

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1888
Wednesday, 30 September, 2009

Statement by H.E. Mr. Alain Joyandet, Minister of State for Cooperation and Francophonie of France to the United Nations

I welcome the convening, on the initiative of the United States presidency of the Security Council, of this public debate on the issue of women and peace and security, focusing on the fight against sexual violence in armed conflict. The worldwide fight against this scourge is a priority.

Sadly, right now the topic is a timely one. During the events of 28 September in Conakry, Guinea, many people were killed and women were raped in the streets of the city. France would like to alert the Council to the tragic situation that is currently taking place in Conakry.

The worldwide fight against this scourge is a priority of France's foreign policy. We are delighted by the commitment of the United States on this issue, and I in this regard I hail the personal efforts of Hillary Clinton.

This new resolution marks a decisive step for the protection of women in armed conflict, nine years after the Council's adoption of the groundbreaking resolution 1325 (2000), and one year after the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008). It will strengthen the genuine implementation of those resolution thanks to its coherent set of provisions.

First of all, the appointment of a special representative of the Secretary-General to direct the fight against sexual violence in armed conflict is a major step forward, aiming to ensure the coherence of United Nations action with the support of United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict. We hope that this post will be created as soon as possible. We would like to see the appointment of a person with experience in the field and real knowledge of the issues of sexual violence. This person should also be in a position to be a voice for the voiceless — that is, the victims of these atrocities. We hope that the Secretary-General's report to identify possible improvements in the coherence of United Nations action, which will be put together over the next three months, will permit the new special representative to gain time when taking up the post.

Next, the creation of a team of experts charged with helping Governments in need will help bolster national authorities with high-level technical expertise available from within the United Nations or made available by nations that so desire.

Within the sphere of peacekeeping operations, newly inaugurated women's protection advisers, whose mandate will be to monitor and follow-up on situations, will complement the actions of gender counselors. France will take a particular interest in ensuring the implementation of this measure. It is also essential that sexual violence be subject to specific follow-up in the reports on peacekeeping operations and the in annual report of the Secretary-General, including information on parties to armed conflict who commit sexual violence in situations that are on the Council's agenda, so as to provide more data and information, which for the moment remains too fragmentary.

I hope to have convinced everyone of the coherence of the set of provisions the Council has established with this new resolution, which include: the special representative; the Secretary-General's report to be completed within three months, to strengthen the effectiveness of the United Nations; the team of experts to better prevent and deal with sexual violence in States where it is necessary; strengthening the contribution of peacekeeping operations through the creation of the post of women's protection counselors; and annual reports by the Secretary-General so that the Council has adequate information, which is an essential prerequisite for its actions.

Allow me to highlight now France's commitment to two complementary elements in this plan: the mechanism for the protection of children in armed conflict; and the need for the Council to decide to impose sanctions where necessary to combat impunity. First of all, we must make use of the possibilities offered by the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. This Group makes it possible to consider problematic situations, to make recommendations and, in case of persistent non-compliance with its recommendations by belligerents, to consider adopting sanctions by the Council. This is a unique mechanism whose effectiveness on the ground is real.

I welcome the very significant institutional progress made by the adoption last month of resolution 1882 (2009), which, inter alia, expanded the monitoring and reporting mechanism of resolution 1612 (2005) to include sexual violence committed against children, independent of the question of whether or not child soldiers are present. While this mechanism applies to children, it can nevertheless make a useful contribution to combating sexual violence against women. Just one figure allows us to grasp the relevance of such an approach: It is estimated that 60 per cent of the women raped in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are minors. In this respect, transparency, cooperation and coordination of efforts between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the new special representative of the Secretary-General on sexual violence and armed conflict will be essential.

We must also accept the idea that without genuine punishment there can be neither prevention nor deterrence. Here, France welcomes the work done by the sanctions committees. Pursuant to the commitment made in resolution 1820 (2008) the Council must systematically consider the possibility of including sexual violence as grounds for sanctions when creating or reviewing the mandates of these committees. When the grounds exist, it is up to the experts to cite them. With this in mind, last March, together with Belgium, the United Kingdom and the United States, we supported the inclusion by the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo of four members of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda on the list of persons subject to individual sanctions.

Finally, France is pleased that the fight against sexual violence was subject to particular attention during the Security Council's annual visit to Africa in May. At that time the Security Council successfully advocated with the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the prosecution of five officers accused of sexual violence. The Council must remain mobilized on this issue.

In conclusion I would like to recall that it is our responsibility to develop programmes to assist victims, to offer them care and prospects for rehabilitation and to work to avoid their stigmatization. Meeting their needs means that they must be systematically consulted and involved in all phases of the programmes designed for them. Members may be assured that France fully associates itself with and will join in the implementation of specific projects to assist victims of rape and other sexual violence.