

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820
Thursday, June 19, 2008

Statement by H.E Mr. Carmon, Representative of Israel to the United Nations

At the outset, allow me to thank the President for having convened this important debate and also to thank Secretary of State Rice for presiding over this morning's debate on such a pressing issue. I also thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership during this month of June. My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly for their statements, and especially the former Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for sharing insights from his personal experience and helping us to better understand the challenges before us.

Eight years ago, the Council adopted landmark resolution 1325 (2000), which, for the first time, addressed the impact of war on women. Israel continues to support the full implementation of this resolution. While progress has been made in some aspects, much more work needs to be done. One aspect in particular, which is the basis of today's debate, calls on parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and emphasizes the responsibility of States to put an end to impunity.

While sexual violence in armed conflict has occurred throughout history, brutal and systematic rape has become increasingly commonplace in some conflict and post-conflict areas. Moreover, sexual violence as a weapon of war is now perpetuated with almost universal impunity in some conflicts. Such actions not only constitute gross violations of human rights, but they also undermine confidence in peace processes and raise huge barriers to reconciliation.

While the international community has recognized that sexual violence can amount to a war crime, crimes against humanity, or constitutive acts with respect to genocide, numerous challenges remain with respect to ending sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

One particular obstacle is victims' reluctance to come forward. Survivors and victims of sexual and gender-based violence often feel ostracized, as they are forced to assume guilt and shame. This silence not only harms the victims and their families, but also leads to faulty statistics. Sources in the field confirm that, indeed, the number of incidents of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict is greatly underreported. Hence victims must be empowered to reclaim their human dignity. States should enforce the rule of law, bring the perpetrators to justice and end the cycle of impunity.

Similarly, a change in societal attitudes and norms regarding sexual violence must be effected, beginning with, as I just mentioned, the bringing of perpetrators to justice. Ending impunity will also encourage victims to come forward to seek justice and rehabilitation. At the same time, we must educate the world's children, at the earliest stages of life, on the rights, dignity and worth of every human being, without regard to their gender.

At the recent Wilton Park conference, recommendations were made that sexual violence be viewed as a security issue and that the international community should identify the circumstances under which sexual violence is a threat to national and international peace and security. In this context, the Council can play a greater role in ensuring that peacekeeping mandates specifically refer to the prevention of sexual violence, that peacekeepers are appropriately trained and informed about sexual violence and that sanctions and other tools are used against perpetrators. In this regard, my delegation fully supports the Secretary-General's call for peacekeepers to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Indeed, resolution 1804 (2008) of 13 March 2008, which imposed a travel ban and asset freeze on individuals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo who commit serious violations of international law, including sexual violence against children, is a good example of how the Council can act more effectively. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported more than 32,000 registered cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the province of South Kivu, Democratic People's Republic of the Congo, alone.

Lastly, we must consider the effects of sexual violence not only on the victims, but also on the children born of

mass rape, sexual slavery and sexual exploitation. The impact of armed conflict on children born of rape and exploitation has economic, health and social implications that must be addressed.

Sexual violence is not an inevitable outcome of conflict. It can be stopped. States, regional bodies, non-governmental organizations and even individuals all have specific roles to play in seeing that an end is put to this detestable practice.

The Council, in particular, can focus on reporting on sexual violence and seek to fully implement resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. In that context, my delegation welcomes and is pleased to co-sponsor the draft resolution currently before the Council. For its part, Israel pledges to continue to fully implement resolution 1325 (2000) and to work to promote women's rights in all of its political and development work. Doing so, in concert with global efforts, will help to build and sustain an international commitment to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict situations.