

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Statement by H.E Mr. Giadalla Ettalbi, Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations

Let me convey our appreciation to Secretary of State Rice who, earlier, personally presided over this meeting. Let me also thank you, Mr. President, for your proposal to hold this open debate on such an important issue.

Libya is concerned at reports of sexual violence against women and girls in many conflict areas. We are even more concerned at the use of sexual violence against women as an instrument of war in some conflict situations. I do not believe that anyone would argue that such acts are not a heinous crime whose perpetrators must be brought to justice and must not enjoy impunity.

Resolution 1325 (2000) took up the issue, and in its paragraph 10 it called on all 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”. In its paragraph 11, the resolution emphasized, “the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls”

It is regrettable, indeed it is a stigma for mankind, that these crimes continue to be perpetrated on a daily basis. For example, it is reported that more than 880 rapes were committed in April alone in North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some estimate that that number reflects no more than 10 per cent of the true figure.

We note that heinous crimes of sexual violence against women in armed conflict, are perpetrated by three categories of people — armed forces personnel of States involved in conflict; personnel of the United Nations peacekeeping forces; and non-State actors that are parties to a conflict.

Due to the varying nature of the perpetrators of these crimes, it is natural that our approach to the problem should be adapted to the perpetrator. We believe that greater awareness of international humanitarian law through education in military institutions could help to alleviate the problem. However, this alone is not sufficient, as law is generally taught only to officers and not to ordinary soldiers, who are responsible for most of these crimes. Furthermore, some soldiers, even when aware of the relevant international law and because of the difficult circumstances of a conflict, do not in general pay much heed to the consequences of their acts. Therefore, Member States, with the assistance of the United Nations, must seek other means to deal with the problem and to raise the awareness of soldiers about the gravity of sexual violence against women and its moral abhorrence.

In this regard, we believe that in many societies religion has more effect than law. We do not believe that there is a single religion on Earth that lacks moral norms dealing with relations between soldiers and non-combatants in situations of war. Let me stress that Islam, for example, has deterrent moral norms related to the behaviour of combatants and their treatment of civilians. Those norms prevent and prohibit all crimes against civilians, including sexual crimes against women and girls.

We therefore propose that the Security Council urge all Member States to concentrate more on the moral and religious aspects of the training of military personnel, including peacekeeping forces. We also suggest the preparation of booklets setting out moral and religious norms related to the treatment of civilians in time of war, in addition to the norms of international humanitarian law. These could be distributed to soldiers in peacekeeping operations. Moreover, we believe that appropriate mechanisms must be created to address complaints by civilian victims of abuse by soldiers, including sexual violence against girls and women. This would also serve to deter such crimes.

Let me recall that all member States bear the responsibility to enact effective legislation against impunity, to conduct education and media campaigns enhancing awareness on women’s rights and training programmes to help eliminate cultural prejudice against women.

We believe that the Security Council can play a vital role in taking the measures necessary to protect women and girls from sexual violence in conflict situations. It can also urge States to prosecute the perpetrators of such crimes, particularly because impunity can put at risk hard-earned national reconciliation and peace.

In conclusion, let me stress that the complete solution to sexual violence against women and girls in conflict situations lies in resolving conflict, attaining peace, creating an accountable, transparent and effective security sector, encouraging development in post-conflict countries and promoting women's participation in many fields.

Through its specialized agencies, the United Nations can contribute by supporting national efforts to advance women and by funding training and education programmes for women and children, in particular in rural areas.

Finally, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for having submitted the draft resolution before us, which we support.