

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace, and Security- 19 June 2008
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MAURITANIA

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in French*): Owing to the lateness of the hour, I will be brief.

At the outset, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on having organized this important meeting on women and peace and security: sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. I would also like to congratulate the United States Secretary of State, Ms. Condoleezza Rice, and the other ministers for their outstanding statements and for having given them some of their time to this important debate. I would also like to thank Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the particular attention they are devoting to combating sexual violence against women in armed conflict.

The presence this morning of a great number of ministers from States members of the Security Council was a sign of the importance that the Council attaches to this issue, because sexual violence can, to varying degrees, pose a threat to international peace and security.

In this respect, I would add the voice of Mauritania to the chorus of those who have preceded us to condemn the degrading and inhuman treatment inflicted upon women through sexual violence committed in armed conflict. Despite all of the legal instruments — which Mauritania has ratified — and despite the actions and initiatives taken by the international community on the protection and advancement of women, we must note that much remains to be done. Women remain victims of the abominable practice that is sexual violence.

We are against all forms of violence against innocent civilian populations, all the more so when it is women who are the victims. Islam, our holy religion, orders us to cherish and protect women, who are after all the mother, the sister, the wife, the daughter — in short, those who are the dearest to us in human society. Sexual violence against women exposes society as a whole to serious dangers: early and unwanted pregnancies for many women, HIV/AIDS infection for mother and child, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, the total demoralization of women victims, negative social repercussions for victims, and so on.

Statistics show that in recent armed conflicts it is civilian populations, that is to say non-combatants, who represent the majority of the victims. Women, who are the main targets of sexual violence in these conflicts, along with children, account for the greatest number of victims.

In this face of this shameful phenomenon, the international community should take all necessary measures to put an end to it and adopt mechanisms where zero-tolerance is

required for perpetrators of these abominable crimes against women, crimes which, moreover, are not limited to a single region of the world.

The Special Rapporteur on violence against women has done remarkable work, but the persistence of rape of women in armed conflict has reached a level that requires a strengthening of the capacities of the Office of the Special Rapporteur, particularly in human resources; here, women should be the focus of the choices that are made. That is why my delegation believes that the proposal made by the Minister for Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of Belgium to appoint a woman special investigator on sexual violence is appropriate as an effective means for eradicating this practice.

Women must also play an active role in peacekeeping operations. Such participation is currently limited; this is especially linked to language issues. To work for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur as a military adviser, it is not enough to speak two official languages of the United Nations. This linguistic obstacle must be overcome to allow women who have the qualifications and who speak at least two United Nations languages to apply for a post in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations if they wish.