

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
Thursday, 25th July 2002, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ambassador Zinser, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations

We are grateful to Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Ms. Angela King and Ms. Noeleen Heyzer for their presentations.

Women and children are those most affected by armed conflicts. Women and girls are frequently the specific and deliberate target of attacks by armed groups and armies in conflicts such as those suffered in Bosnia, the Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and other countries. Attacks, violations, abuse, subjugation and murders of women have outstripped other military objectives and goals of conquest.

In conflict situations, women play very diverse roles as refugees, as heads of families, as the backbone of their communities, as peace activists and even as combatants. Nonetheless, when mechanisms for peace are designed, women and their experience and needs are ignored or little valued, and they are excluded from the formal processes of negotiation and peace-building. Women — their social perspective, their understanding of problems stemming from violence and their efforts to reconcile — can make the difference between war and peace. So that women, in particular those in societies affected by conflict, can have a voice in peace processes, it is fundamental to incorporate gender perspectives into peacekeeping operations in a much more systematic way, in conformity with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

My delegation recognizes that there have been advances in mainstreaming gender perspectives into peacekeeping operations, but we are not satisfied. The process is slow and the achievements are limited. With women's active participation, their viewpoints and their perspective, peacekeeping operations can have better mechanisms for confidence-building in the reconciliation of communities broken by hatred and rancour. It is a question of facilitating, with the active presence of women, communication between peacekeeping missions and the local population so that the international presence can truly contribute to the restoration and consolidation of peace. In short, it is a question of making peacekeeping operations more effective.

In considering the establishment or the renewal of a peacekeeping operation, we must take into account the accumulation of principles, instruments and plans formulated since the World Conference on Women, held in Mexico in 1975, including the guidelines adopted by the Security Council and by the Economic and Social Council, and the study by the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as studies undertaken by the Secretary-General and by the United Nations Development Fund for Women — studies that are about to be released.

In that regard, my delegation wishes to insist on the need to take concrete steps that are measurable in the short term, so that there can be closer cooperation on this subject among the Security Council, the General Assembly and the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council; so that gender perspectives can be incorporated in a truly systematic way into all peacekeeping operation mandates; so that verification mechanisms — preferably external — can be established to ensure that those mandates are implemented; and so that there can truly be greater participation by women in all stages and at all levels of peacekeeping operations, including those of planning, implementation and assessment. The Member States of the Organization must conduct more effective campaigns to recruit women and, above all, to present candidates for leadership and decision-making posts. There are few women who have been in charge of a United Nations peacekeeping mission. That must change, and such change depends on Member States, but also — and above all — on the Organization's being consistent in its principles and guidelines. In that regard, I welcome the recent appointment of a woman as Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Georgia. It is fundamental that training courses for members of peacekeeping missions — as well as for staff working for those missions at Headquarters — incorporate gender perspectives. Any operation must have at least one gender expert. And it is also important that that function not always be performed by a woman, as is usually the case. Strong mechanisms should be established to investigate cases of abuse and exploitation of women by armed groups, by State authorities or by members of peacekeeping operations.

In accordance with the foregoing, full implementation of the provisions of international humanitarian law, of international human rights law and of emerging international criminal law should be promoted. Systematic and generalized attacks on the physical integrity and dignity of women — crimes whose victims are women in conflict situations — must be definitively prosecuted and punished by international law as war crimes — as crimes against humanity.

The recognition of a link among gender, conflict and peacekeeping, as reflected in resolution 1325 (2000), is only one aspect of the broad subject of mainstreaming gender perspectives, with respect to which the United Nations must demonstrate its leadership, most especially if it wishes its views to be emulated outside the Organization.