

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

Statement by H.E Mr. De Klerk, Representative of Netherlands to the United Nations

Our thanks go to you, Mr. President, and to Secretary Rice for having organized this important debate and for providing an opportunity for the Netherlands to make some remarks in addition to Slovenia's intervention on behalf of the European Union.

In 2000, resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security was adopted unanimously by the Council; in 2002, the Rome Statute entered into force; in 2005, the Peacebuilding Commission was established; and, most recently, the Secretary-General launched the Campaign to End Violence against Women by 2015. Despite all these developments, little has changed on the ground. Sexual violence against women in conflict continues unabated and is at unacceptable levels. The incidence of rape is on the increase.

For the Netherlands Government, women's empowerment is a top priority. Women's rights are everyone's concern. The Netherlands is therefore taking a firm stand against the horrific violations of women's rights and human dignity that are taking place in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. That is why the Netherlands supports the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. Also, last December, the Netherlands Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Interior and 15 civil society organizations agreed on a national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). An increasing number of Member States are elaborating similar action plans. We now need to focus on implementation. We need to join forces. What should we do?

First, we need to target men. Gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be achieved without the involvement of men. Men need to talk to men, and they have to speak openly to militia leaders, gang leaders and sometimes the generals to be better role models. If we want sexual violence to end, we need to raise awareness among men about the consequences of their actions. In situations of conflict, boys and men are constantly confronted with models of violent masculinity. Discussions should also take place between men and women, with boys and girls, within communities, to start the healing process and break the cycle of sexual violence.

Secondly, acts of sexual violence should not go unpunished. We owe this first and foremost to the numerous victims. But everyone also should know that if they commit such a crime, they will not and cannot escape justice. Justice is imperative to ending impunity. Governments need to take vigorous action. National judicial systems should be strengthened in order to ensure that such criminals are caught, tried and effectively punished. If national systems fail to bring perpetrators to justice, the International Criminal Court comes into play. The Rome Statute clearly defines rape and other forms of sexual violence, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians, as crimes against humanity. Fighting impunity is also one of the key elements of the resolution on all forms of violence against women that the Netherlands and France present in the General Assembly.

Thirdly, acts of violence against women are often committed by soldiers — the very people who are supposed to provide protection. The Netherlands Ministry of Defence invests in promoting gender equality in the armed forces. Gender training is mandatory and is included in the curriculum of the School for Peace Operations. We believe that all peacekeeping troops and police contingents should be given comprehensive gender training before deployment. Moreover, gender awareness training should be mandatory for all persons in leadership positions in conflict and peace building situations, including civil, military and diplomatic representatives. Additionally, the United Nations should make an extra effort to appoint more women to senior leadership positions in peacekeeping missions. The United Nations should also vigorously implement its zero-tolerance policy. Commanders should shoulder on their responsibility and arrest perpetrators. In this respect, I would like to highlight the recent report of Save the Children United Kingdom about widespread sexual abuse of children and women by aid workers, and above all, by United Nations peacekeepers. It is intolerable that persons who should be providing assistance or protection on behalf of the international community take advantage of the situation to sexually abuse women and children.

Finally, women are not just victims. It cannot be repeated often enough that women and women's

organizations have to be included in peace and reconciliation processes. They also need to be involved in formulating justice and reparation programmes, including post-rape care.

The Netherlands very much welcomes this open debate and commends the presidency of the United States for its effort to put this heinous crime so prominently on the agenda of the Council. Sexual violence is linked to peace and security. The adoption of a draft resolution co-sponsored by the Netherlands will be an important step in recognizing that link. We look forward to a report of the Secretary-General which initiates a process to ensure follow-up by the Security Council and to improve coordination of United Nations activities on the ground. Finally, we hope that this process will also include the monitoring of actions taken by parties to implement their responsibilities.

We cannot tolerate what is happening to mothers, daughters, wives and grandmothers. Sexual violence in armed conflict has to stop. It is my responsibility, it is your responsibility; it is the responsibility of us all.