

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

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Statement by H.E Mr. Yukio Takasu, Chairman of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations

I would like to commend the leadership of the United States for organizing this open debate, and I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to participate in my capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The landmark resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security calls upon all parties involved to ensure the protection of and respect for the human rights of women and girls and provides a solid framework for women's equal and full participation in every stage of building peace and ensuring security. The challenge we face is to generate stronger political will and spur greater concrete actions.

Since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), steady progress has been made in helping more women to participate in post-conflict decision-making. Significant percentages of the national parliaments of many post-conflict countries are now women. More women are taking leadership positions in the executive branch. Several female Special Representatives of the Secretary-General have been appointed. The international community has been gaining more understanding of the unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls and a growing recognition that women's participation is essential to ensuring conflict resolution, inclusive reconciliation, peacebuilding and sustainable peace.

However, we have been less successful in protecting women and girls from gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict. Many women still suffer from a sense of insecurity. They remain particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, both in the midst of conflict and in its immediate aftermath. We need only look at the situation of sexual violence and abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Darfur to understand the horrific magnitude of the problem and how urgently we must address it. We must admit that our collective response to gender-based violence has been inadequate thus far, and this failure to respond is magnified over time, because the effects of sexual violence linger long after the fact, undermining and threatening the potential for peace and stability. Every effort must be made to promote the human security of women and girls in a fragile situation by physically protecting and empowering them.

In order to take effective measures to meet those challenges, there are several actions that the Security Council may wish to consider. First, collecting actual data on the impact of sexual violence on women and girls and on perpetrators is an important first step to establishing a strategy to meet their needs on the ground. Secondly, ending impunity and prosecuting those responsible for such sexual crimes cannot be overemphasized and will facilitate communal reconciliation in post-conflict situations. Thirdly, gender-sensitive training programmes for peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel must be strengthened, at both the national and international levels. Fourthly, the mandate of peacekeeping operations could reflect more concrete actions in implementing resolution 1325 (2000), in order to mainstream a gender perspective and provide protection from gender-based violence.

The Peacebuilding Commission, which is a very new body, has been ensuring, through its advocacy role and resource mobilization efforts, that a gender perspective becomes an integral part of any peacebuilding process. Significant efforts have been made to engage women and gender equality groups at various levels of the Commission's work, fully reflecting the priorities and issues of relevance to women's groups. Gender perspectives have been included as a critical and priority issue in the integrated peacebuilding strategies for Burundi and Sierra Leone. Commitments to be undertaken by the Governments and the international community are clearly articulated in order to combat gender-based violence, ensure greater participation of women at all levels of decision-making and build the capacity of women's groups and national gender-equality institutions.

The working group on lessons learned also considered the issue of gender and peacebuilding earlier this year and concluded that the gender issue should be viewed not just as a women's issue. It is an imperative in any peacebuilding effort, including security sector reform. We cannot effectively deal with this complex problem if the burden of responsibility for doing so rests only with women. The existence of legal frameworks and policies is not enough, because they will not end violence by themselves. Compliance, implementation and

enforcement are critical. The issue should be tackled in a holistic manner, including not only security and justice sector reform, but also basic social services such as education and health services, employment and income generation, in order to empower women and girls.

In countries emerging from conflict, national Governments and other local stakeholders are ready to address the root causes of conflict, including the marginalization of women. But they often do not have the sufficient resources and capacities to do so effectively. On the ground, that requires a range of integrated efforts for multiple stakeholders such as government institutions, United Nations entities and civil society organizations. We need stronger support to improve the operational capacity of all of those players in order to fully meet gender equality commitments.

We must also work with local women's groups to fight prejudice and stigma and advance efforts to end impunity for such crimes. The roles of parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and the media are also important to enhance the accountability of the authorities and those in power for their actions — or, sometimes, their inaction.

With that recognition, I assure the Council that the Peacebuilding Commission will continue to make every effort to raise the international profile of the needs of women and girls in peacebuilding efforts and to mobilize the necessary support and resources in a coordinated and integrated manner.

It is my sincere hope that today's open debate will help to generate more political will and greater action. We must all do our part to match the fine words of the Security Council's resolutions, with concrete actions that make a real difference for the women and girls whom the Council has pledged to protect and empower.