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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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**STATEMENT
BY**

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FIRST SECRETARY**

**ON
WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY**

**SECURITY COUNCIL
UNITED NATIONS**

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Mr President,

It is an honour for my delegation to participate in today's open debate on Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. My delegation wishes to express its support for the recommendations of the Secretary-General in his Reports before the Council during the past three years, as well as the initiatives undertaken by UN specialised agencies and Member States, in pursuing this topic.

As we confront the challenges of peace and security in global terms and in particular in Africa, we acknowledge the need to remain vigilant concerning the impact of armed conflict on women and girls. However, the leadership role women could have in situations of conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict peace-building efforts, remains under-utilised, despite commitments made at Beijing, Beijing Plus Five and in the outcomes of major conferences and summits.

The Millennium Declaration agreed on MDG three on the importance of achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and that women should engage, on an equal basis with men, in the political, economic, social and civil development of their respective countries and continents. Women's participation are therefore critical, especially during periods of transition so as to ensure gender mainstreaming takes place in the areas of democracy, good governance and human rights.

Mr President,

Concerning implementation of Resolution 1325, South Africa has undertaken certain initiatives at the national level. We have also enhanced our partnership with UN agencies through the recent visit of the Executive Director of UNIFEM, when on 16 May 2003, the South African Parliament hosted the African launch of the UNIFEM report on "The Independent Experts' Assessment of Women, War and Peace" and the impact of armed conflict on women and their role in peace-building.

The event generated huge interest and was of importance to South Africa and our partners in Africa. As a result, the report will be tabled in a number of Parliamentary Committees to ensure that the gender dimensions of peace and security, including the implementation of human rights treaties such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and draft Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, be incorporated into national structures.

At the regional level, the African Union (AU) decided to include women in contributing to the peace process, and to enhance their active participation in this regard. The African Union also acknowledges that failure to ensure gender equality and empowerment of women seriously undermines a peaceful and violence-free environment.

The Union's first initiative in this regard was in 1998 when an "African Women Committee for Peace and Development" (AWCPD) was established to ensure the participation of women as decision-makers. This structure was successful in raising the awareness of women on the issues before us today. The Committee initiated, for example, the Solidarity Mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in December 2001, to support Congolese women in their preparations for effective participation in the Inter-Congolese dialogue hosted in South Africa early in 2002.

Networks of women working for peace in the Great Lakes Region have also been established and Committee members have been on teams to observe elections in African countries, in line with the AU's commitment to implement gender equality.

Furthermore, the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations strengthened these initiatives.

Mr President,

As a country, we have remained principled on the issue of gender mainstreaming and as a co-sponsor of UN resolutions on the advancement of women at all levels, our leadership is keenly aware of the centrality of women as peacemakers and facilitators in political processes and peace-building initiatives.

My delegation has consistently stressed the importance of gender mainstreaming in United Nations peacekeeping operations and we are encouraged to learn that the presence of gender expertise in these missions has contributed to some progress in gender mainstreaming in the field.

In this regard, my delegation welcomes the appointment of an interim Gender Advisor in the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and expresses the hope that the permanent position of Senior Gender Advisor will be filled as a matter of priority.

Furthermore, the valuable gender mainstreaming work by the UN Secretary-General's Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues (OSAGI) in the recent peace processes in Liberia, is testimony to the urgent need for this unit at UN Headquarters. We trust that the human resources capacity of the OSAGI office would be expanded, in accordance with the objectives of SCR 1325.

My delegation would also recommend that the international community consider establishing centres of excellence for training women for leadership positions in peacekeeping operations. This could assist the UN system in accelerating progress in the rate of representation of women at the professional and higher levels.

The effectiveness of the United Nations' capacity in maintaining peace and security could be strengthened by improving the number of women in senior positions and in peacekeeping missions, and we hope that appropriate and measurable targets to achieve this objective, could be adopted.

The most obvious reason is that it is a fact that through women's presence and their effective participation in peacekeeping operations, the benefits gained by local women and girls, including other vulnerable groups caught up in armed conflict improves drastically.

Mr President,

In conclusion, the women of our continent know our destiny is inseparable - that our citizens are bound together by geography, history, heritage, and often conflict. In roles of leadership or as caregivers, women wish to be partners in the peace-process and in building secure futures for generations to come.

They, however, cannot do it alone without the realization of the principles contained in the operational paragraphs of Security Council Resolution 1325.

I thank you