

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

Statement by H.E Ms. Stiglic, Representative of Slovenia to the United Nations

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

In the interest of time, I will limit myself to an abbreviated version of our statement. The complete and official statement on behalf of the European Union is being distributed in the room.

I would like to begin by commending the United States presidency on the initiative to convene this thematic debate. The presence of the United States Secretary of State today, as well as that of other high-level representatives, shows that the international community understands the urgency of this important issue and stands ready to take it forward. We hope this timely and topical debate will help us do just that.

I would like to recall a remark made by Major General Patrick Cammaert in his statement at today's debate, that it is more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier right now in armed conflict. Women have always been particularly vulnerable victims during armed conflicts, but in modern history sexual violence has developed into a method of warfare.

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), linking gender equality to global security and acknowledging the importance of women's voices in building lasting peace, represents a milestone on the road to more gender-sensitive peace processes and security policies. We must considerably strengthen our efforts to guarantee the protection of women and girls in conflict-affected societies and to ensure their full and equal participation in peace processes at all levels, including negotiations and decision-making, insisting that women be fully engaged in all humanitarian, reconstruction and development programmes.

The European Union believes that the best way to promote women's rights and women's empowerment and to respond to the needs of women is through a gender-sensitive approach. Human rights and gender issues are being mainstreamed in our development cooperation policies. Through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, we have supported women's participation in peace processes in Colombia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. Furthermore, the EU Initiative for Peacebuilding will be exploring ways to ensure the effective implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) by the international community, Governments and local civil society organizations. We also have a strong commitment to mainstream gender equality in the European Security and Defence Policy.

Sexual and gender-based violence is an area of particular concern to women and girls in armed conflict situations, although we know now that also boys and men may be subjected to such violence and to sexual torture. Violence against women and girls, including rape and sexual slavery, is often used as a weapon of war in order to demoralize women themselves or the community to which they belong. Importantly, high levels of sexual and gender-based violence also rarely cease at the end of hostilities and continue well into the post-conflict phase.

Examples from the recent past and, unfortunately, at this present moment show the extensiveness and severity of sexual violence against women in armed conflict. Today, armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are using sexual violence as a weapon of war to terrorize the population. In Darfur too, women and girls continue to be affected by high levels of gender-based violence and sexual crimes including rape, while impunity remains a serious problem.

The short- and long-term costs of sexual and gender-based violence were largely underestimated or ignored in the past and there still remains a lack of coordinated and effective action. Such violence is surrounded by a culture of silence and impunity, and the range and complexity of the underlying causes make it a difficult issue to address, particularly in conflict-affected situations, where judicial and security institutions are weak.

Impunity for perpetrators and an insufficient response to the needs of survivors are unacceptable. Grave violations of women's human rights through massive rape and other sexual violence require the immediate attention of the International Criminal Court and other relevant tribunals.

There is a strong need to develop and promote innovative approaches that turn women from victims of rape into rape survivors. Such approaches should ensure their safety and support their access to justice, and should actively support their economic empowerment through income-generating activities. Furthermore, they should also ensure adequate care, recognizing women's sexual and reproductive health needs.

On this occasion, the European Union reiterates its strong commitment to the zero-tolerance policy, in the firm belief that under no circumstances can gender-based violence be condoned in peacekeeping or other United Nations-led operations. There should be no impunity for gender-based violence in the United Nations.

Every United Nations peacekeeping mission should include, as a priority, the protection of women and the safeguarding of women peacebuilders and should include information about sexual and gender-based violence in its regular reports to the Security Council. Furthermore, it is essential that all military and civilian personnel serving on United Nations peacekeeping missions receive training on the protection and rights of women.

In conclusion, the European Union looks forward to the adoption of a strong and action-oriented draft resolution, with a broad sponsor base as an outcome of this thematic debate. We express our support for developing an effective and comprehensive system-wide approach for addressing the issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict with clear monitoring and accountability mechanisms.