

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

Statement by H.E Mr. Baum, Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

I thank the United States for organizing today's open debate and giving us the opportunity to speak on this very important issue.

Sexual violence in armed conflict shows a very serious gap in the protection of civilians that was rightly recognized and addressed in resolution 1325 (2000). We look forward to the adoption today of the draft resolution, of which we are co-authors, affirming that the prevention of acts of sexual violence can contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security.

We are deeply troubled that sexual violence against women and girls is still prevalent in situations of armed conflict. Such conduct is unacceptable, and even more so when committed by peacekeeping personnel.

Switzerland has adopted an action plan for national implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), and it attaches the highest priority to combating gender-based and sexual violence in the context of armed conflict.

Practical measures are urgently needed in order to strengthen prevention of and protection against sexual violence. To this end, the following four priority lines of action should be considered.

First, Switzerland stresses the importance of fighting against impunity. Acts of sexual violence must not go unpunished. The prosecution of persons suspected of having committed such acts is, first and foremost, the task of States. However, when States are unwilling or unable to prosecute acts of sexual violence amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide, such cases must be referred to the International Criminal Court. The Court clearly has a crucial role to play in fighting impunity.

It is therefore essential to build up national law enforcement capacities to ensure that States are able to prosecute the perpetrators of sexual violence. Without improved understanding of the root causes, the mechanisms and the consequences of acts of sexual violence, the perpetrators of gender-based and sexual violence will continue to enjoy impunity.

Furthermore, disciplinary measures at the unit commander level cannot be a substitute for military criminal prosecution.

Secondly, systematic gender training should be given to personnel working in the security sector, including those in the armed forces, police and justice systems, as well as United Nations personnel. Security personnel must be able to respond in an appropriate and timely manner to the different security needs of women and men. It is therefore crucially important that senior management personnel be included in gender training programmes to ensure that dealing with sexual violence against women forms an integral part of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We welcome the specific references to the matter in the draft resolution.

Thirdly, the Security Council should consider establishing a monitoring mechanism to increase accountability and ensure the integration of resolution 1325 (2000) into country-specific and related thematic work. To this end, the Council should also set up a structure for obtaining timely, accurate and reliable information on sexual violence committed in situations of armed conflict. United Nations field missions could be entrusted with this task and thus serve as an early warning system.

In addition, the Security Council could ask the Secretary-General to submit reports on best practices, based on the expertise of specialized agencies or programmes, such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women and UNICEF, and take into account the security assessments of local and international women's organizations.

Fourthly, the Security Council may wish to consider the problem of sexual violence against women and girls, as referred to in resolution 1325 (2000), in conjunction with resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1674 (2006), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict.

Finally, Switzerland supports implementation of the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on this issue and the establishment of conduct and disciplinary units in all peacekeeping missions. Furthermore, cooperation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services should be strengthened. The goal is clear: all United Nations personnel — military or civilian — must be trained in the highest standards of conduct and be held responsible for maintaining them.