

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace, and Security- 19 June 2008
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TONGA

Mr. Tupouniua (Tonga): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States, comprising Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country, the Kingdom of Tonga.

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your strong leadership in convening this open debate. We share the concerns raised in the presidential statement of October 2007 (S/PRST/2007/40), wherein the Security Council condemned all acts of gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict committed against women and girls, including killing, maiming, and sexual violence and abuse. We commend the work that Security Council has done in addressing gender-based violence with the adoption of resolutions 1325 (2000) and with the more recent adoption of resolutions 1468 (2003), 1493 (2003) and 1590 (2005).

Gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict is a violation of women's basic human rights. It is also a concern raised by the Secretary-General in his report containing an in-depth study on all forms of violence against women published in 2006 (A/61/122/Add.1). The report recognized that there are many forms and manifestations of violence against women in a wide range of settings, including the family, the community, State custody and institutions, armed conflict and refugee and internally displaced persons situations. The Secretary-General emphasized that

“violence constitutes a continuum across the lifespan of women, it cuts across both the public and the private sphere and one form of violence often reinforces another.”
(A/61/122/Add.1, para. 365)

What we are seeing in some parts of the world is the use of rape and sexual assault as systematic war tactics in destroying the cohesion of communities. In some cases, women who were raped or sexually assaulted during situations of armed conflict face rejection by their families and communities. They are often ostracized and left to fend for themselves. These women face debilitating poverty and discrimination, and many subsequently fall into the vicious cycle of further exploitation and abuse by working in the sex trade; many are exposed to the danger of human trafficking.

In the light of women caught in situations of armed conflict, we urge the Security Council to recognize gender-based violence as a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security. We recommend that, where appropriate, the Security Council systematically monitor incidents of gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict. Furthermore, we recommend that, where appropriate, the Secretary-General systematically include comprehensive information on gender-based violence in his reports on conflict-affected situations and that he prepare a special report to the Security Council with timely information on sexual and gender-based violence, thereby initiating the process of follow-up for the Security Council and United Nations agencies.

We congratulate the sponsoring countries for taking the initiative to put forth today's draft resolution, which reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and

resolution of conflicts and peacebuilding and highlights the fact that violence, intimidation and discrimination may erode women's legitimacy and their capacity to participate in postconflict public life, reconciliation and post-conflict peacebuilding processes.

In our efforts to support the victims of sexual and gender-based violence, we must provide women with psychological care to help them achieve long-term stability.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of taking a preventive attitude towards sexual and gender-based violence and other factors that may endanger the security of women. Sexual and gender-based violence does not occur in a vacuum. Unfavourable political, social, cultural, economic and environmental exerts pressure and therefore reinforce existing vulnerabilities and gender inequalities.

It is important for the Security Council to address cross-cutting issues such as climate change in relation to women's security. Climate change is an emerging cross-cutting issue with serious security implications. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its fourth assessment report, highlights the vulnerabilities of developing countries and states that poor communities are especially vulnerable due to limited adaptive capacities and are more dependent on climate sensitive resources.

Women and children account for an estimated 70 per cent of the world's poorest population. Women in developing countries are responsible for an estimated 45 to 80 per cent of household food production. Women are arguably much more dependent upon agriculture for their livelihoods and survival. Thus far, the effects of climate change are mostly likely to erode women's capacity to provide for themselves and their families, due to the loss of their livelihoods.

It is important to recognize gender differences not just in terms of differential vulnerability but also as differential capacity to adapt and to mitigate the effects of climate change. Climate change is not genderneutral; rather, gender is an important determinant in climate change mitigation and adaptation. The lack of provisions for integrating a gender perspective into adaptation and mitigation strategies will seriously threaten the security of women. Women need to be empowered economically and must receive training and capacity-building to better adapt to the effects of climate change. It is also imperative to increase grassroots assistance to women in their efforts to preserve their livelihoods.

The link between climate change, the security of women and gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict is closer than one would expect. The developing world is facing more exogenous threats and risk factors than ever before. During the Food Security Forum in April this year, the Food and Agriculture Organization warned that long-term food insecurity would lead to the chronic undernourishment of the world's poor. An estimated 850 million people worldwide suffer from hunger, and the number is likely to increase by 4 million each year. Experts at the Forum cautioned that without proper mitigation and adaptation strategies and resources to implement such strategies, many developing countries will see their coping capacity diminish over time. The loss of arable land, the increased frequency of natural disasters, weakened infrastructure, increases in epidemic diseases, population displacements, the increase in poverty and competition for natural resources are drivers of conflict.

Since nearly one third of the world's poorest population live in countries that are fragile or conflict-affected, they will also be the ones most likely to be affected by or to engage in resource wars — armed conflicts over the use of natural resources, including oil, water

and arable land. In a recent interview, António Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, reinforced the likelihood of the situation as he explained that climate change could also uproot people by provoking armed conflicts over increasingly scarce resources.

Such conflicts will have a devastating impact on developing countries, and it is very likely that women will be exposed to physical and psychological harm and sexual and gender-based violence. We therefore urge the Security Council to take a preventive approach in dealing with sexual and gender-based violence by considering climate change as a threat to women's security and to the maintenance of international peace and security.