

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

Mr. Mansour (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to take this opportunity to convey to Ms. Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State of the United States, my sincere congratulations on her country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank her for having taken the initiative to organize this debate on a topic that is as important as it is topical and which calls for a response from the entire international community.

I also welcome the participation of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, and many ministers this morning. The active and involved participation in this debate of so many delegations of Member States reflects the primary interest that we all attach to issues of peace and security and to the central role of women in achieving this and in achieving the ideals of our universal organization. But it also highlights the role that we must play in order to promote women's rights in general and to protect and provide care for the victims of the horrors and brutalities of conflict in particular.

While it is understood today that the international community must make greater efforts to promote the status and rights of women and to take appropriate action in that context, even more so must we protect them during times of conflict. Violence against women is, by definition, a dehumanizing and unacceptable practice and an abject violation of basic human rights. Such practices must be fought and forcefully punished.

The efforts made to that end by the United Nations and its Member States can only be praised and encouraged. However, reports issued by the United Nations and its specialized agencies give us alarming statistics on the treatment of women and on their sufferings and call upon us to redouble our efforts to put an end, once and for all, to the violence and abuses committed against women. We should recall, in this context, that at the 2005 World Summit our heads of State or Government reaffirmed the importance of protecting civilians, particularly women, in conflict and post-conflict situations. They also emphasized the need to promote women's rights as an essential precondition for peace, security and development worldwide.

The international community possesses an impressive legal arsenal for eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and for protecting them as a vital force in every society. It is thus up to us to ensure rigorous implementation of the provisions of the relevant international legal documents and instruments, and to ensure that women in our societies, particularly those affected by war and conflict, finally benefit from the protection and attention that they deserve in order to bring about lasting peace and stability in our world.

Today's debate makes it incumbent upon us to make a collective commitment to ensure that women, wherever they are, are no longer vulnerable, are no longer placed in an inferior position and are no longer exposed to discrimination, threats or terror. In this framework, our civilizations must choose to genuinely participate in the global move towards ensuring that women get the place and role that they deserve in today's societies as full-fledged citizens, partners benefiting from equal opportunities and holders of

responsibilities in all sectors and at all levels. This is, of course, a blueprint for a civilized society where women are a guarantee of modernity, a vehicle for development, a guarantor of political stability, and especially a preventive security shield against any obscurantist and retrograde tendencies — in other words, the spearhead of a society mobilized for progress and prosperity.

That, in any case, was the path taken in promoting the status of women in Tunisia, launched immediately after Tunisia achieved its independence in 1956, with the adoption of a personal status code. This is one of the basic pillars of the new plan for our society that is being undertaken by independent Tunisia thanks in large part to the reformist revival brought to our country by President Ben Ali. The principle of gender equality under the law was thereby enshrined and women were given a position at the forefront of the social and political modernization of the country. This has secured the position of Tunisian women in political life, making them an essential component of society and an effective, genuine agent of progress and stability.