

**Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820**

**Thursday, June 19, 2008**

***Statement by H.E Ms. Patricia Scotland, Baroness Scotland of Asthal and Attorney General for England and Wales of the Government of the United Kingdom to the United Nations***

The United Kingdom welcomes the leadership shown by the United States in holding this debate during its presidency of the Council. Your presence here today, Madam President, demonstrates just how important it is for us all to tackle the growing problem of sexual and gender-based violence if we are serious about resolving conflict. I rejoice at the sight and the fact that of the 20 representatives around the Council table, seven are women, who are here to add their voice to the wise counsel given by their male counterparts and colleagues, adding substance and support to the draft resolution before the Council, which focuses on the plight of women caught in the pernicious tentacles of conflict.

May I also commend the Secretary-General for his vision and for his determination to increase the number of women who will be able to make their contribution to the Council's work and the reduction of conflict.

Before I turn to the issue of sexual violence, I would like to say a few words about Aung San Suu Kyi, who, as you rightly reminded us, Madam President, today spends a further birthday under house arrest. The Burmese people have suffered under military rule since 1962. It is fitting that we remember Aung San Suu Kyi as we talk about women, peace and security in today's debate, and remember, too, the many ordinary women of Burma, who have often borne the brunt of the violence, persecution and economic deprivation imposed upon them by the military Government. We call for Aung San Suu Kyi to be released immediately and for her to be allowed to play full part in Burma's political process.

In conflict, women and children suffer disproportionately. Sexual violence is among the very worst of the atrocities that they face, and it is increasingly being used as a deliberate method of warfare. Every day we hear reports from the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and the media — and most recently from the International Criminal Court — about the systematic use of sexual violence to terrorize civilian communities and populations, to drive forward ethnic cleansing and to destroy communities. We have seen it in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the ex-genocidaires from Rwanda are primarily responsible. We see it in Darfur, in Somalia and elsewhere. In Zimbabwe, the hired thugs of Mugabe's regime brutalize and murder the wives and children of leaders of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. Only yesterday, the wife of the newly elected mayor of Harare was savagely beaten and killed by the so-called war veterans, in order to intimidate the opposition party in next week's elections.

In all those places we see the physical and psychological scars of the survivors of sexual violence and, chillingly, the silent testimony of the horribly disfigured bodies of those who did not survive. And we see the empty, burned-out villages from which the population has fled to avoid further attacks. And that is the point. The trauma and injuries caused by sexual violence are designed to cripple communities, trigger revenge attacks and cause lasting bitterness. In that way, gender-based violence feeds the fires of conflicts that the Council is dedicated to extinguishing.

But some, of course, will say, what is new about this? After all, it is true that rape and sexual violence have been associated with conflict since before records began to be kept. Three things have changed. First, sexual violence is now being used as a tool of warfare, rather than it being just a tragic by-product of conflict, and it is taking place on a much larger scale than we have seen before. Secondly, we now better understand how sexual violence damages the prospects of post- conflict recovery. And, thirdly and perhaps most important, we have the means to tackle this problem within our reach.

Resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and resolution 1674 (2006), on the protection of civilians, have provided an important foundation. Many nations, international organizations and non-governmental organizations are doing valuable work to tackle sexual violence.

But sexual and gender-based violence is evolving, and the Council's response must also evolve. My Government believes that the Security Council should show leadership on the issue of sexual violence, first, by recognizing that widespread and systematic sexual violence can pose a threat to international peace and

security. Secondly, the Council shall ensure that we provide for women's participation in all processes relevant to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The proliferation of sexual violence against women is, in part, aimed at excluding and marginalizing women's roles in society and in rebuilding communities. We have to correct that.

Thirdly, the Council should propose practical measures that parties to armed conflict can take to prevent sexual violence and ensure that those who commit such crimes are brought to justice. That includes peacekeepers as well as belligerents. Fourthly, but not least, the Council should require regular updates about sexual violence in situations of armed conflict so that we can better understand how to prevent it.

We are realistic. Sexual violence will, sadly, not go away overnight. But resolution 1325 (2000) is a crucial building block to tackling that growing problem. The civil populations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, Somalia, Zimbabwe and elsewhere need the Council's continued efforts to tackle the growing scourge. The United Kingdom support the draft resolution before the Council in document S/2008/403 without reservation. We thank you, Madam President, and all those around this table who have lent their voice to that end.