

**UNIFEM**

*A Commitment to the World's Women...*

working for women's empowerment and gender equality

**Statement by Noeleen Heyzer  
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Security Council's Open Debate on  
Women and Peace and Security**

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Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Ms. King, Excellencies,

I am honoured to participate in the Council's first debate on women and peace and security chaired by His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Namibia. UNIFEM and women worldwide congratulate the Presidency for its vision in convening this historic initiative.

I want to begin by paying tribute to the Secretary-General for his strong message and commitment, and his presence here today. UNIFEM shares the views Angela King has presented and fully supports her work to mainstream gender in peace support operations.

It is significant that this debate takes place on the first United Nations Day of this millennium as so many of the issues involved go to the heart of our Charter.

Mr. President, the Council's actions on the related themes of conflicts in Africa, the protection of civilians, and children and armed conflict set the stage for this debate.

But the discussion today on women and peace and security has a very specific focus. We are here today because the intertwining forces of conflict and gender inequality threaten international peace and security.

We are here because women continue to be targeted in wars. Because rape and sexual violence continue to be used as weapons of war. Because the vast majority of all refugees and displaced people are women and children.

We are here because women have played a leadership role in the cause of peace - but their efforts have not been recognised, supported or rewarded.

The subject of today's debate is close to all of our hearts. Like Agnes from Uganda, whose voice you have just heard, nearly all girls abducted into armed groups are forced into sexual slavery. The vast majority become infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and, increasingly, HIV/AIDS. In addition, women and girls are forced into sex for safe passage, food, and other protection.

Women are seldom protected from these threats. Their aggressors are seldom punished. What kind of sadly ambiguous message does this send to the predators who continue to rape, exploit, torture and mutilate?

We are here today to support collective action against the most chilling consequences of this destruction of women.

That is the crux of today's debate, women's protection in armed conflict and their participation in peace processes.

Human security and national security make up two sides of the same global security coin. Mr. President, I would like to put to the Council another assertion: that without international action, women caught in conflicts will have no security of any kind whatever the definition. And without their full participation, the peace process itself suffers for there will be neither justice nor development.

In your own words, Mr. President, women are half of every community, are they therefore not half of every solution? How can we, in good conscience, bring warlords to the peace table and not women?

For almost ten years, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has provided assistance to women in crises and has supported their participation in peace processes. I will not overstate our reach. We are a small fund. Our impact is based on synergetic partnership with our sister funds and programmes - including UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, as well as the vibrant non-governmental (NGO) community.

UNIFEM shapes its activities for women in conflict situations around five fundamental points. These form the core of our agenda for peace and security and relate to specific actions the Council could take to improve women's protection and support their peacebuilding efforts. If we are to deal fairly with women and girls in conflict, these must be acted upon with urgency.

### **1. Understanding the impact of armed conflict on women and girls:**

No full-scale assessment of the impact of armed conflict on women has yet taken place. This must happen. We need to examine every aspect of the consequences of conflict for women to guide future action. Ironically, it has happened for children, but not yet for women - their primary caretakers and among those most affected by conflict.

But understanding the impact is simply not enough. We must also act with greater sensitivity. We know, without question, that insensitivity to gender issues can have severe consequences. This was the case in Kosovo last year.

Thousands of displaced men, women and children had gathered together in a stadium. With a megaphone, an official made a broadcast announcement for all women who had been raped to report to a particular area.

Not a single woman came forward. Not a single woman was prepared to risk the stigma or the potential repercussions of having identified herself publicly in this way.

As a result, every single survivor lost the chance of holding her aggressors accountable and of receiving life-saving support.

Understanding the way conflict affects women and girls is crucial to ensuring their protection and to designing gender-responsive policies and programmes.

### **2. Improving protection and assistance for women and girls:**

International protection and assistance systematically neglects women and girls. In my visits to war-torn countries, I have seen these gaps with painful clarity. I have heard about the unanswered fate of the mothers and the thousands of children born of rape and forced impregnation.

In camps, I discovered that items as basic as sanitary napkins and as critical as reproductive health services were not considered essential humanitarian relief.

In conflict after conflict, I have met the mothers of the disappeared. I have walked through valleys of widows - huge communities of women left alone to fend for themselves and their families.

These women live each day, choked with painful memories of their own humiliation and torture and of those of their loved ones. They bleed and live with physical and emotional scars.

And as if this were not enough, they are also struggling to claim their property, their inheritance, and their land. Incredibly, some have also to struggle to retain their children.

Protection and humanitarian assistance for women is glaring in its inadequacy. We have seen the failure of political settlements to protect women's rights. The complacency of the international system, Mr. President, is at the very core of this debate.

### **3. Supporting women's leadership in peace-building**

In conflicts, women are activists, caretakers, providers and survivors. We know that some women participate actively in conflicts. But the vast majority have held their families and communities together.

From the grass roots level to the peace table, UNIFEM supports women's participation in peace-building. We try to leverage political, financial and technical support so that women can have an impact on peace efforts nationally and regionally.

Somali, South African, and Guatemalan women have set inspiring examples of peace-building across class, clans, political affiliation and ethnicity.

Up until 4 months ago, the situation of Burundian women and girls had been completely ignored in negotiations for peace in that country.

But in July, as you have seen in the video, UNIFEM succeeded in bringing Burundi's 19 negotiating parties to accept the need for women's involvement in the peace process. This led to the first All Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference. Twenty-three of the Burundi women's

recommendations made to the facilitator, former President Nelson Mandela, were included in the final peace accord.

A precedent was set and the entire peace agreement benefited. Now, support for implementation remains the crucial challenge.

#### **4. Bringing a gender perspective to inter-governmental peace and security initiatives**

Peace support operations establish the framework for international and regional action. Much attention has been given to increasing the number of women in these operations, at the helm and among the ranks. Although a few women have served at the highest levels, it may be sobering to point out that of the 61 current Special and Personal Representatives and Envoys of the Secretary-General serving in peace support functions, not a single one is a woman.

The placement of gender advisers in Sierra Leone, Kosovo and East Timor may present a new model, if they are adequately supported. But all such arrangements must involve women and provide gender experts in their design and implementation. There is no acceptable rationale for protecting women in some countries and not others.

Mr. President, I believe that women's concerns will only be addressed when women, in significant numbers, are there to represent them. But, having a woman force commander will not, alone, ensure that the mandate of the operation deals with gender. Having a woman judge will not ensure that war crimes against women are prosecuted. There is more that we have to do.

Gender expertise must inform the planning of these operations from the very beginning.

For example, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration must be designed to meet the special needs of women combatants, of the girls and women who have been abducted into armed groups, or of the families of former soldiers who are trying to return to civilian life. Electoral systems must take women into account - as voters or as candidates. Civilian police must address the issues of trafficking and sexual violence which are associated with conflict.

Mr. President, I name these few examples to show how the Security Council can help ensure that international and regional initiatives not only benefit women - but are also strengthened by them.

#### **5. Supporting gender justice in post-conflict reconstruction:**

After conflicts, resources are depleted, infrastructure is destroyed, and social, economic and political relationships are strained. Successful reconstruction depends upon the use of every available resource. Women, who have held social and economic fragments together, represent the most precious and under-utilised of these resources.

Unless a country's constitutional, legal, judicial and electoral frameworks deal with gender equality, then no matter what happens after conflict, no matter how peaceful a transition, the entire country will never have a fair chance at development.

During the transition to peace, a unique opportunity exists to put in place a gender responsive framework for a country's reconstruction. Nowhere is this more possible than in East Timor.

Last week during my visit there, I saw a country struggling to rebuild. I was inspired by the efforts of East Timorese women, together with UNTAET, working to improve legislation and to strengthen local capacity to advocate for gender sensitive laws and policies.

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Mr. President, barely four months ago I had the privilege of leading an international delegation to Jerusalem, to support a common women's agenda for peace in the Middle East. Far away from the limelight of formal negotiations, Palestinian and Israeli women have been engaging in dialogue ever since the eighties when such contact was illegal.

Back in June, they were determined to tackle the thorniest issues. Their ability to make headway on almost all the moot points, including Jerusalem, was fuelled by the sense of urgency

they shared about the delays in implementing signed agreements. This was leading, in their view, to a dangerous erosion of public trust in the leadership of both sides and the potential outbreak of violence.

If only their concerns had been heard.

Today, I urge the leadership on both sides not to ignore women's contributions to this process. I urge them to build on partnerships where they exist and which women have been able to shape.

Mr. President, the outcome of today's debate can go a long way toward maintaining and sustaining peace. If I may, Mr. President, with humility and without presumption, suggest a number of ways in which the Council could improve women's protection in conflict and support their role in peace building by:

1. Ensuring that human rights verification, observer missions and peacekeeping operations focus on gender based violations and women's human rights. Authorising such operations at the first signs of conflict is the best form of prevention. The security of women is the best indicator of the security of a nation. Any early warning system must take women's voices into account.
2. Calling for all peacekeeping personnel to be trained in their responsibilities to women and children. Mandatory in-service training should be provided as soon as a mission is assembled. This is not meant to be a substitute for what needs to be done at the national level.
3. Calling for the elaboration of a code of conduct for peacekeeping personnel and the establishment of clear reporting on sexual violence in a peacekeeping environment. This should include enforcement and monitoring mechanisms for peacekeeping personnel, through the creation of an Ombudsperson, an Inspector General, or an office created especially for that purpose.
4. Ensuring that field operations protect and support humanitarian assistance for women and girls, and especially those who are refugees and displaced. Special measures should be taken to protect women and girls from rape and other forms of sexual violence.
5. Ensuring that the peace-building elements of an operation are gender-sensitive, particularly when designing disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes, in strengthening governance and public security institutions, in defining the role of civilian police, and in providing electoral assistance. These are the first steps for ensuring that women are central to post-conflict reconstruction.
6. Ensuring that any support offered by the Council to a peace process, any investigation of disputes, or any attempts at mediation or settlement, make explicit the need to involve women and address the substantive concerns they bring to the table.

And finally, Mr. President, the Council can deepen its commitment to women by supporting Graca Machel's call for full-scale assessments of the impact of armed conflict on women and of women's role in peace-building. This is long overdue. For UNIFEM's part, we stand ready to support this call and any other that the Council deems necessary. We may be small Mr. President, but are effective and we can find the resources and rally the necessary support.

Women in conflict situations have special needs and important contributions to make to peace and security. Recognising and supporting both of these aspects with equal vigour, can prevent many lifetimes of untold sorrow and pain.

I thank you.