

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1888
Wednesday, 30 September, 2009

Statement by H.E. Mrs. Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State of the United States and President of the Security Council to the United Nations

There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1888 (2009).

I now have the privilege of making a statement in my capacity as Secretary of State of the United States of America.

I am very grateful to speak before the Security Council on this important issue. I want to thank everyone who has worked very hard to reach this point on this resolution and, of course, to have it adopted unanimously. We are here to address an issue that has received too little attention, not only in this Chamber over the past six decades, but also, I would suggest, in all of our halls of Government across the world. It is an important issue that goes to the core of our commitment to ensure the safety of the United Nations Member States and their citizens.

Under the United Nations Charter, the 15 members of this Council bear primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Satisfying that responsibility includes our protecting the lives and physical security of all people, including the women who comprise half the planet's population. This responsibility is particularly acute in circumstances where peace and stability are challenged.

Even though women and children are rarely responsible for initiating armed conflict, they are often war's most vulnerable and violated victims. The resolution we have adopted today represents a step forward in our global efforts to end violence perpetrated against women and children in conflict zones, and it builds on two prior Security Council resolutions — resolution 1325 (2000), which calls on all parties in conflicts to respect women's rights and increase their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction efforts; and resolution 1820 (2008), which affirms the ambitions set out in resolution 1325 (2000) and establishes a clear link between maintaining international peace and security and preventing and responding to sexual violence used as a tactic of war to target civilians. Yet, despite these actions by the Security Council, violence against women and girls in conflict-related situations has not diminished; in fact, in some cases it has escalated.

Reading the headlines, one might think that the use of rape as a tactic of war happens only occasionally or in a few places, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo or the Sudan. That would be bad enough, but the reality is much worse. We have seen rape used as a tactic of war before in Bosnia, Burma, Sri Lanka and elsewhere. In too many countries and in too many cases, the perpetrators of this violence are not punished, and so this impunity encourages further attacks.

Last month, I travelled to Goma in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where over 1,100 rapes are reported every month. I met with survivors of sexual violence, and the physical and emotional damage to individual women and their families from these attacks cannot be quantified, nor can the toll on their societies. The dehumanizing nature of sexual violence does not harm just a single individual, a single family or even a single village or a single group; it shreds the fabric that weaves us together as human beings. It endangers families and communities, erodes social and political stability, and undermines economic progress. We need to understand that it holds all of us back.

Also, our failure as an international body to respond concretely to this global problem erodes our collective effectiveness. So we must act now to end this crisis, not only to protect vulnerable people and promote human security, but also to uphold the legitimacy of this body.

The international community has made progress. Many peacekeeping mandates now include Security Council requests for strengthened measures to prevent and respond to sexual violence. In Chad and the Sudan, United Nations peacekeepers have clear instructions underscoring their responsibility to protect local populations against sexual and gender-based violence. I recently met with United Nations troops in Liberia, who provide an excellent example of the steps a United Nations mission can take, both through its own actions and in cooperation with the host Government, to prevent violence against women and girls. It is also very important

that the United Nations Mission in Liberia includes an all-women police unit from India. That all-women police unit has helped to motivate more Liberian women to become police officers, and the Mission has launched a joint United Nations- Liberian campaign against rape.

These steps are essential but, alone, they are not sufficient. Resolution 1888 (2009) identifies specific steps that the United Nations and Member States can and should take to improve the Organization's response to sexual violence committed during situations of armed conflict. It calls on the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative to lead, coordinate and advocate efforts to end sexual violence. We expect that person to engage at high levels with civilian and military leaders to spearhead the United Nations activities on this front. It also calls on the Secretary- General to rapidly deploy a team of experts to work with Governments to strengthen the rule of law, address impunity and enhance accountability, while drawing attention to the full range of legal venues that can be brought into play, including domestic, international and mixed courts that bring local and international judges and prosecutors together to strengthen local justice systems.

We must also recognize that ending conflicts outright is the most certain path to ending sexual violence in conflicts. So pursuing peace and successful post-conflict transitions should be our highest priority. In States where conflict is taking place and in those that are moving beyond it, local police must receive better training, the rule of law must be strengthened, and survivors must be ensured full access to justice and protection throughout the judicial process. We envision that the team of experts called for in the resolution will help us to strengthen initiatives like those.

Beyond the measures outlined in the resolution, the Security Council should take additional steps. Protecting women and children should be a critical priority for all troops who wear the blue helmet. To reflect this, new and renewed peacekeeping mandates should include language condemning sexual violence and giving further guidance to peacekeeping missions to work with local authorities to end it. We must seek to ensure that our respective military and police forces, especially those that will participate in peacekeeping missions, develop the expertise to prevent and respond to violence against women and children. This will be helped by increasing the number of women who serve in United Nations peacekeeping missions. When I visited the Mission in Goma, I was very impressed at how integrated it was in every way — staff from every country, every kind of person represented, and many women in the leadership as well as in the ranks.

Let us not forget that it is often women who lead the call for peace in communities shattered by violence. We have seen women in this role from Liberia, Rwanda and Northern Ireland to Guatemala. Even when they suffer terrible losses in conflicts they had no part in starting, women have the will to reach across divisions, find common ground and foster understanding. As they seek peace, so must we by making sure they are part of all efforts. So I urge United Nations Member States to make sure that their foreign assistance programmes include measures to prevent and respond to violence against women and children and to ensure that women are included in designing and implementing those programmes.

In his speech to the General Assembly last week, President Obama challenged nations of the world to assume responsibility for the challenges confronting us.

Certainly, the challenge of sexual violence in conflict cannot and should not be separated from the broader security issues confronting the Council. It is time for all of us to assume our responsibility to go beyond condemning this behaviour and take concrete steps to end it, to make it socially unacceptable, to recognize that it is not cultural; it is criminal. And the more we say that, over and over and over again, the more we will change attitudes and create peer pressure and the conditions for the elimination of this violation.

When I was in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I was told of an old proverb that says, "No matter how long the night, the day is sure to come". Well, I hope our work today, and every day going forward, will hasten the time when thousands of women around the world will be able to feel comfortable in walking the streets of their cities and villages freely again, to work outside their homes, collect firewood and water without fear, play with their children, spend time with their husbands and enjoy all the blessings of life in freedom, peace and security.

That is our dream for a better future for them and for us, and I thank this body for the strong commitment that this resolution represents.

