

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
Thursday, 25th July 2002, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ambassador Negroponte, Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations

We welcome this discussion on conflict, peacekeeping and gender. We thank Under-Secretary-General Guéhenno for his presentation, and we thank Angela King, the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, and Noeleen Heyzer, the Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), for their efforts to increase women's participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peace-building.

As the Security Council stated in resolution 1325 (2000), "Civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict." But they also play an essential role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

The United States Government is fully committed both to working to respond to the needs of women in times of conflict and to supporting the role that women play as planners, implementers and beneficiaries of peace processes. Indeed, President Bush has stated that fostering respect for women is an imperative of United States foreign policy, among goals that are "grounded in the non-negotiable demands of human dignity and reflect universal human values."

On the specific question of women and conflict, Secretary of State, Colin Powell, in a speech delivered on 8 March of this year, International Women's Day, called women the most vulnerable group when conflict erupts and social structures break down. He then said, "In societies torn by violence, maternal and infant mortality rates skyrocket. When the men and boys go off to fight, the women struggle to care for family members left behind and to find ways to provide for their basic necessities. For all these reasons, much of our crisis response activity is geared toward meeting the needs of female victims of conflict, and we make a point of involving the women who are on the receiving end of our assistance in the shaping and carrying out of our relief programmes."

It is clear that in any conflict, women on both sides are vulnerable. It is regrettable that my Syrian colleague has again used the Security Council to raise the impact of the conflict in the Middle East on Palestinian women, without acknowledging the impact of that conflict—in particular, dozens of homicide bombings that have taken place in the past year—on the women of Israel. As I said last night, we must be mindful of the responsibility of each and every United Nations Member State to cease providing safe haven for Palestinian groups that finance, plan, support or commit terrorist acts.

Returning to the subject at hand, since resolution 1325 (2000) was adopted, the United Nations Secretariat and United Nations peacekeeping missions have made changes to take better account of gender concerns. We support these changes but agree that more progress can and should be made.

Although we know women are more likely to suffer in times of conflict, this does not mean we should view them merely as victims. We agree that there remains a lack of awareness on the part of policy and decision makers that war affects men and women differently and that women and men bring different perspectives to the peace process. We commend the commitment of Under-Secretary Guéhenno to improving the gender awareness of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to that need. Although I know the Secretary-General and the Secretariat have worked to improve gender awareness in the United Nations, there remains work to be done. As we look at peacekeeping, peacemaking and post-conflict peace-building, the Security Council, as well as regional and subregional actors, needs a systematic means of integrating women as planners, implementers and beneficiaries of our collective efforts. The Secretariat should expand the number of women appointed to positions at all levels, including high-level envoys, as well as human rights investigators and monitors.

Sustainable peace requires the involvement of women as well as men. Several examples illustrate the need to expand the participation of women in peace operations. The concern that United Nations employees may have been involved in the sexual exploitation of women in West Africa is a reminder that there should be a large number of women in peacekeeping missions and other United Nations efforts. This applies not only to West Africa, but also to Bosnia and other United Nations missions. The United Nations zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation by United Nations employees is the right way forward, and we encourage further efforts to ensure all United Nations employees are aware of the policy and that violators are punished. Not only can female peacekeepers bring a heightened awareness of the

special risks of women in conflict, but women often find it easier to express concerns to other women. We encourage DPKO to further expand the number of women as peacekeepers, civilian police and civilian members of peacekeeping missions.

Women also have a valuable role to play in conflict prevention and peacemaking. In that regard I would like to recall the instrumental contribution of the Mano River Union Women's Peace Network to generating a dialogue among the leaders of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. We all should seek the assistance of women's groups and other nongovernmental organizations who contribute to so-called track two negotiations around the world.

Thank you again, Mr. President, for convening this discussion. I look forward to hearing the further comments and insights of our other colleagues.