



*Permanent Mission of the Republic of Zimbabwe
to the United Nations*

STATEMENT BY

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**AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON
"WOMEN AND PEACE AND SECURITY"**

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Mr. President,

I wish to congratulate you on your initiative to convene a meeting of the Security Council on such an important subject, "Women and Peace and Security." Your Government and country are well known for providing leadership and example in promoting an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes.

Please allow me to congratulate my colleague, Ambassador Martin Andjaba, on the splendid manner in which he has steered the work of the Council since assuming its presidency at the beginning of this month.

Mr. President,

Today's subject matter lies at the very centre of our endeavours to promote the culture of peace in human society. Rather than being treated as an agenda item to be ticked off the Council's work programme at the end of this meeting, this issue must be pursued on a continuing basis, and can be ignored only at our peril.

When war breaks out, invariably we all pay a cost as individuals, as families and society, and as nations and members of the international community. Every occurrence of an armed conflict is a serious indictment on humanity. War is, in fact, a dehumanizing experience. To the extent that armed conflict is a challenge to all of humanity, everything to do with peace and security becomes the responsibility of all of us.

Today's specific reference to "women and peace and security" reflects our acknowledgement of the particular vulnerabilities of women in conflict situations. It also reflects our acknowledgement of current inequalities in decision-making and power structures and, happily, our sincere endeavour to address that untenable condition.

That women have everything to lose and an unbearable cost to pay in the wake of armed conflict establishes an undisputed mandate and role for them in all matters of peace and security. Unfortunately, and as correctly observed in the Windhoek Declaration of 31 May 2000, (the 10th Anniversary of the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group - UNTAG), "So far, Women have been denied their full role in these efforts, both nationally and internationally, and the gender dimension in peace processes has not been adequately addressed."

Mr. President,

Virtually, every war episode is accompanied by chronicles of horrendous assaults on the dignity and humanity of women. Dastardly as it is, the victimization of women-folk has even been employed as a tool for the perpetration of war, in some cases. The humanitarian fallout of armed conflict has almost always been disproportionately burdensome on women as refugees or displaced persons, or as traumatized household heads with nothing but debris for a new beginning. Nobody can understand, let alone address this fallout better than women themselves.

Mr. President,

There is a glaring need for mechanisms that enhance the protection of women and girls in conflict situations. Current statistics show that more than three-quarters of all internally displaced persons and refugees are women and children. My delegation therefore supports Security Council calls upon all concerned to refrain from human rights abuses in conflict situations, to respect international humanitarian law and to promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and a culture of peace.

However, it is obvious that preventive measures, which have the potential to resolve disputes before they erupt into violent confrontations, offer the best possible protection to all members of society. In this regard, it is crucial that we recognize the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building. The organized involvement of women at grass-root and other levels makes them the linchpins of any early warning mechanism. Mr. President, this meeting offers us an opportunity to once again call upon the United Nations and the international community at large to assist and cooperate with regional and sub-regional arrangements, such as the OAU Mechanism for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts, as they seek to build their capacity and develop common indicators for early warning, taking into account women and gender issues.

Mr. President,

While distant international actors have tended to highlight only political and economic disruptions in the aftermath of armed conflict, the victims of war often wake up to social disorientation and disorder. In these collapsed communities, the role of women in re-establishing and preserving social order is unparalleled. As primary and continuing educators both in their families and in their communities, women play an important role in fostering a culture of peace in strife-torn societies. We call for the promotion and sustenance of this role on a continuing basis in order to prevent the resurgence or escalation of conflict, so that the culture of peace is inculcated in current and future generations. This constitutes a sure way of planting seeds of a sustainable peace.

Mr. President,

While women are not necessarily better connected to the grassroots or more committed to conveying the concerns of marginalized people, while there is no evidence to suggest that women at the peace table are more committed than men to promoting the greater good of the population at large, women are more likely than men to have arrived at the peace table via civil activism, often with first-hand experience of the brutal consequences of violent conflict. Both men and women suffer during war, but women are more likely to be the targets of gender-based violence. Furthermore, the direct participation of women at the peace table is the most secure way to ensure that women's demands are incorporated in the agreements.

Mr. President,

The maintenance and promotion of international peace and security cannot be realized without fully understanding the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, without effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and without women's full participation in the peace process. We are pleased to note that in many parts of the world, representing all continents, from Africa to the Middle East and Asia, from Latin America to Europe, women have not waited to be invited to the peace table, but have risen to meet the challenge, with an impact that was, in some cases, nothing short of legendary. While women clearly need access to the peace table in order to advance toward the goal of gender equality, the peace table also requires women's participation to truly uphold the principle of democracy and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace.

Thank you.