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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

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Women and Peace and Security

Statement by H.E. the Hon Robert Hill Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

Madam President

Australia would like to thank you for including this issue on the Council's agenda, and we join others in expressing our support that it is the subject of an open debate.

Crimes of sexual violence are one of the most widespread and egregious of all violent acts committed during armed conflict. Not only do these crimes target the most vulnerable members of society, but their legacy, which includes the stigmatization of victims and children born of rape, and the spread of deadly disease such as HIV/AIDS, remains with affected communities for generations.

We note with regret and disgust that sexual violence is often perpetrated by parties to a conflict, and is all too often used as an instrument of warfare itself. Put simply, the deliberate and widespread use of sexual violence is a crime against humanity and, if used as a method of warfare, a war crime. Australia condemns this egregious behavior and demands that the impunity of perpetrators for these despicable acts stop. The international community must hold rapists to account. We have the tools, including the International Criminal Court, at our disposal, and we must mobilise these urgently.

As we are all too aware, crimes of sexual violence are also, in some circumstances, perpetrated by UN personnel. Any act of sexual violence or exploitation by UN

personnel undermines the credibility of the UN in times of crisis and impedes a UN mission from implementing its mandate. More than that, it is a gross breach of trust. Any act by UN personnel which impedes its most fundamental role – responding to threats to international peace and security – is unacceptable.

Madam President

The role of UN peacekeepers in the protection of civilians from all violence, including sexual violence, is an important one. While protection of civilians is specifically included in eight UN peacekeeping mandates, there is a strong need to develop clear guidelines to ensure effective implementation of this task. Australia will continue to advocate that this essential guidance be provided to missions. Peacekeepers must also have effective mechanisms, and sufficient resources, at their disposal to give effect to their mandate.

The role of police in peacekeeping operations is also of fundamental importance. The specific function of police in times of crisis will differ for example, they may be responsible for responding directly to incidents, or they may provide a mentoring role for local police. Regardless of their role, effective training is always essential. Australia provides its police with training and guidance on sexual violence and also provides pre-deployment training to police forces from regional countries for missions, such as the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). We also recognise the important role of women in peacekeeping missions, whether they be military, police or civilian.. Almost 20% of Australian police and military personnel currently involved in peacekeeping missions are women. Not only are women deployed by Australia, they often hold senior roles within these missions.

Australia reiterates calls by the international community for effective training and strong command structures within military and police contingents, be they blue berets or not, to prevent, and in situations where such crimes have occurred, to prosecute these crimes.

Australia strongly supports the Secretary-General's zero tolerance policy, and we welcome the significant progress made to eliminate and address sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel, including revision of the Model MOU and the adoption of a Victim Assistance Strategy.

The absence of an effective system to prosecute UN personnel who, while a member of a peacekeeping mission, perpetrate sexual crimes, should not lead to impunity. Where this is the case, the state of nationality should take action to hold their own nationals to account.

National governments must initiate, promote, and implement strict behavioral standards for all security personnel. Community education is also important, especially for those who come into contact with victims of sexual violence. Removing the stigma, all too often attached to survivors of sexual violence, and condemning this violence, are important elements of such education. Australia recognises, in this regard, the important role played by humanitarian actors and non-governmental organisations in providing support services to survivors and facilitating community awareness programs.

It is also essential that victims of sexual violence have effective and equal access to justice, and that national systems, including appropriate national legislation, are in place to ensure effective judicial outcomes. In circumstances where these are not in place, Australia stresses the need for the rapid establishment of the rule of law to facilitate effective responses.

Madam President

This is an important issue which requires the full attention of the international community. We urge the UN system and member states to lead by example and to redouble their efforts to respond to the crime of sexual violence in armed conflict. As a first step, Australia calls on member states to undertake more extensive pre-deployment training for all personnel, including those bound for UN missions. All peacekeeping personnel must undertake specialized training on the protection, special needs and human rights of women and children in conflict situations. This training should also include measures to protect against sexual violence. We cannot stand by and allow these egregious violations to continue – more must be done to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our societies are protected.