



MISION PERMANENTE DE LA REPUBLICA DE COSTA RICA
ANTE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS

Statement on the Thematic Debate on Women Peace and Security
Statement by Ambassador Jorge Urbina Ortega
Permanent Representative of Costa Rica
June 19, 2008

Madam President,

Without a doubt, the 21st Century should be the century of women. Despite all the advances reached during the last century, women crossed the threshold of the third millennium bearing the heaviest of all human burdens.

We are very clear that this is not the forum to advocate for the emancipation and empowerment of women. But we welcome this as an opportune occasion to debate on the issue of violence against women in situations of armed conflict.

In this day and in this place we are witnessing a convergence of the efforts to make war more humane and also to recognize for women everywhere their full status as human beings.

Two weeks ago, a group of Ambassadors who are sitting around this table, visited several camps for refugees and internally displaced persons in Darfur, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In these camps we listened to the voices of women who told us about the suffering of war, the murder of their partners, the massacre of their children and the violation of their bodies.

These experiences oblige us to avoid that this debate conceals behind technical language the reality of pain, humiliation and suffering.

This must be a debate that responds effectively to the wish expressed by those women. None of them spoke about vengeance. But I do remember them speaking to us about their hopes, their desire to return to their homes and their dreams of living in a safe and secure environment. I remember them hoping not to be victims of further violations.

From this debate we should leave with a clear disposition to prevent. Until now we have concentrated our efforts on repressing violence against women in situations of armed conflict and on fighting impunity. We have somehow limited ourselves to trying to implement security sector reform, and not always with much success. Our efforts to end

impunity such as the actions undertaken by the International Criminal Court and the Special Tribunals, although very important and indispensable, are not sufficient.

We must enhance what we are doing now and we also have to learn and engage in prevention mechanisms and this will be a complex and difficult process. If we really want to be effective, if we really want to help women in times of conflict – women in Africa, in the Balkans, women everywhere, women of today, yesterday and tomorrow – then we must undertake the difficult task of engaging in prevention.

And I say this is difficult because prevention is not the same everywhere, in all places or in all cultural perspectives. I say this is difficult because prevention cannot be tackled only from the perspective of the woman. Such a thing would be tantamount to making her guilty of her own pain. The prevention of violence against women, in war and in all other contexts, can only be done by addressing the perspective of the perpetrators.

The treatment of violence against women in situations of armed conflict cannot be understood or prevented if it is analyzed only through the optic of sexual violence. We are witnessing abhorrent methods of warfare, these are weapons of terror whose victims are not just their direct casualties but also their families and communities.

Madam President:

We should not trivialize this phenomenon, since doing so would mean that we would continue failing to prevent it and to respond effectively. It is indisputable that sexual violence, when it is carried out in a systematic, generalized mannered and as part of an attack against innocent populations, exacerbates armed conflicts and becomes an enormous obstacle to their resolution and to the consolidation of peace.

For this reason Costa Rica pointed out in the debate last month on peacebuilding convened by the United Kingdom, the need for all peacekeeping operations to be conceived as integrated missions that bring together all the efforts of the United Nations, including the contributions of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Only if we do so, Madam President, will we be on the road of prevention and will we be able to give a definitive response to this problem which has kept women from fully exercising their important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in the consolidation of Peace.

Thank you.