



CROATIA

PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK

Check against delivery

STATEMENT by
H.E. Mrs. Jadranka Kosor
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Family,
Veterans' Affairs and Intergenerational
Solidarity
of the Republic of Croatia

- Security Council-
**Open thematic debate "Women, Peace and
Security: Sexual Violence in Situations of
Armed Conflict"**

United Nations, New York
June 19, 2008
820 Second Avenue, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10017
tel. (212) 986-1585, fax (212) 985-2011

Madam President,

At the outset, I wish to thank you and the US Presidency for the opportunity to discuss the issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Croatia, as a country which has been exposed to the horrors of war, strongly believes that the Council has to pay its undivided attention to this phenomenon, which is a serious threat to international peace and security.

Madam President,

Rape and other forms of sexual violence against women are heinous crimes that have been in the past decades often used as a method of warfare. The existing culture of impunity must be overcome.

Today, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Sudan and Somalia, and elsewhere, women continue to be targeted by parties to armed conflict during the war and in post-conflict period.

This Council had the opportunity to witness the plight of civilians, women and girls, during its recent Mission to Africa. Briefed by my Ambassador, I am even more assured that more needs to be done by all of us in order to find justice and a decent life for victims of conflict.

The use of sexual violence creates an atmosphere of insecurity and helplessness with devastating effects - the number of girls in school continues to fall, women and girls are exposed to HIV/AIDS and stigmatized in their communities.

The persistence of rape in situations of armed conflict is a sad reminder of our evident failure to provide security and protection to women and girls in conflict and post-conflict countries.

Madam President,

Speaking from the experience of Croatia, it would be remiss of me not to mention what we, Croatian citizens, witnessed of this heinous practice. Even on Croatian territory, in the heart of Europe, rape was used as a method of intimidation and terror by the Aggressor, during the aggression to which Croatia was exposed at the beginning of 1990s. Bosnia Herzegovina, which has been tormented by the same source of aggression, suffered the use of rape and sexual violence as an instrument of ethnic cleansing.

I therefore believe it is my solemn obligation to warn you that these crimes must never, and I repeat never, escape the hand of justice. For this reason, the Hague Court, as well as local courts, must be the last instance of justice for the victims and a reminder that there can be no tolerance for the crime of rape.

Madam President,

We are aware that the response of national communities in conflict areas to sexual violence against women and girls, has unfortunately been inadequate. Combating sexual violence requires well planned preventive measures at a national and international level.

We are of the view that governments should ensure the participation of women from the early stages of negotiating peace and in its reconstruction. Women must also be given the possibility of being elected to political office, while support mechanisms for newly-elected women must be ensured.

However, without ensuring their physical safety and economic security through social norms, efforts to engage women in decision making processes will not succeed. Due to a lack of these norms, we have witnessed the assassination of many women human rights defenders worldwide.

Madam President,

My delegation would also like to reiterate the commitments from the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document as well as Security Council resolution 1674. Peacekeeping missions must have strong, clear and goal oriented mandates, including the authorization to use force if necessary to protect civilians.

In this context, Croatia strongly condemns all acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by all categories of personnel in UN peacekeeping operations. We call upon all troop-contributing countries to take preventive measures, including pre-deployment awareness training, and to investigate and prosecute all perpetrators of sexual violence.

In the framework of its commitment to international peace and security, Croatia is increasingly involved in contributing to international peace-keeping missions. Currently Croatia participates in 15 UN missions and plans to expand. Moreover, Croatia has specific guidelines that regulate its participation in peacekeeping operations. We are strongly committed to a zero tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation by peacekeeping personnel.

Madam President,

Woman's role in peace-keeping is unique, prompting an increasing demand for its presence. It is our policy to deploy women to missions, either as members of the Croatian Armed Forces or the Croatian Police.

Women have been engaged on a range of issues where the female point of view or their presence makes a difference - including in support to civil society or addressing problems of family violence.

Allow me now to inform you about the progress achieved at the national level.

Following our election as a non-permanent member to the Security Council for the period 2008/09, we are ready to take a proactive role in the promotion of this initiative - safeguarding women's right in conflict situations and strengthening women's roles in post conflict building.

Furthermore, through the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality (2006-2010) special measures for achieving integration of the gender perspective in national security policy and the promotion of Security Council resolution 1325 are being implemented.

Also, as an example of good practice between government and non-governmental sector, I would like to mention that the Government Office for Gender Equality has given support to the NGO project "Women Recollecting Memories: Gender Dimension" on women's experiences of war. It is based on the idea that dealing with the past strongly influences the processes of transitional justice and reconciliation, creating conditions for stability, democratic development and lasting peace. This cannot be achieved without active participation of women.

On the regional bases we would in particular like to stress our war experience. As it is known in the refugee population more than 50% of the uprooted people are women and girls. In July 1992 Croatia hosted 341,000 refugees, among which 80% were women, children and elderly. Croatia provided for all shelter and food, as well as temporary protection status and medical insurance. The assistance from specialized agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF was valuable. As a consequence of war atrocities, we in Croatia still host 1600 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina

Madam President,

Croatia is a part of a region that has suffered in the near past from armed conflict. We are fully aware of the role both the Security Council and international community can play in addressing sexual violence against women and girls, especially when used by political or military leaders as a means of achieving political or military objectives.

We believe that the Security Council needs to provide strong and effective leadership on this issue, including by taking concrete action when necessary, with the ultimate aim of eradicating this abhorrent behavior.

Thank you, Madam President.