

FRANCE

Conseil de sécurité

Débat public

« Les femmes, la paix et la sécurité »

Intervention prononcée par Mme Rama Yade,
Secrétaire d'Etat chargée des Affaires étrangères et des droits de l'Homme,
auprès du Ministre des Affaires étrangères

New York, le 19 juin 2008

(Vérifier au prononcé)

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Security Council

Open debate

“Women and peace and security”

Speech delivered by Mrs Rama Yade,
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights

New York, 19 June 2008

(check upon delivery)

Mr. Secretary-General,
Madame Secretary of State,
Ministers,
Ambassadors,

The history of men has long merged with the history of their violence. In these marriages of blood with history, the war of men has all too often also been associated with the story of violence against women.

We are celebrating this year the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, which a man and a woman, an American and a Frenchman, had a decisive part in inspiring: René Cassin and Eleanor Roosevelt.

In the face of this mysterious and barbaric violence of war, in the face of this part of inhumanity, the Declaration affirms the inviolable dignity of the human being. Of men and women.

The universality of rights is that of man and woman equally.

This is the principle we reaffirm today in this public debate on sexual violence in armed conflict, and I thank you, Madame Secretary of State, for taking the initiative for holding this meeting.

Our Council has a duty to address these issues: and it must act in consequence.

Doubts have sometimes been raised: Is a debate on the issue of sexual violence in armed conflict to be included on the agenda of the Security Council which debates peace and war?

For France, the debate has been decided: one does not re-establish peace while remaining silent about the rape of women and the violence done to them.

Even as such violence has climbed to shocking levels in the recent past, and even today—in the former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda, the DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan—every time in the midst of the horror of populations hunted down or massacred there is the unbearable procession of mutilated and sexually tortured women; and every time, the appalling litany of testimonies which revolt the conscience.

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When sexual violence becomes a weapon of war, when rape is perpetrated according to a planned and systematic scheme of terror and subjection, our Council is right to intervene.

Not to do so would be a crime against conscience.

It is urgent to act.

The figures alone do not give the complete picture of the terror and horror that each violated and tortured woman experiences in her innermost being; they do, however, show the extent of the tragedy in their macabre accounting.

I have just returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I traveled to the Kivus. In 2007, in six months, in the eastern Congo, nearly 30,000 women were raped.

I met several dozen of these women.

I listened to their naked, tragic stories in which the humanity of man seems effaced. These testimonies are unbearable. One's spirit is overwhelmed with pain.

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We have an obligation to act.

What have we done so far?

In 2000, the Council adopted resolution 1325, "women, peace and security," which is our basis.

What has the international community done since?

There is no peace without justice. We must welcome in this regard the progress of international justice which has made sexual violence a crime against humanity and in some cases a crime of genocide.

Intentions and progress in law are not enough, however. The law must also be supported by action.

Those who have committed such acts of violence must be sought and brought to justice. That is what each of the women violated in the DRC whom I met told me. Let us listen to their supplications.

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France welcomes in this regard the start of an investigation by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court into the atrocities committed in the Central African Republic, among which sexual violence figures on a massive scale. This inquiry recently led to the arrest and transfer to The Hague of Jean-Claude Bemba on the charge of rape constituting by its extent war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In bringing this charge, the International Criminal Court sends a strong signal to perpetrators of crimes against humanity: any perpetrator of crimes, regardless of rank, will have to answer for his actions.

The fight against impunity is the first rampart against barbarism.

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At the political level, a post of special representative of the Secretary-General on violence against women was established in 1994. This mechanism has played a significant role in sounding the alarm and increasing awareness, and that is why I wish to pay tribute to the action of the current holder of the office, Ms Ertuk.

We must also hail the work of the United Nations to increase awareness through its various agencies, among them, UNFPA, the inter-agency "Stop Rape Now" campaign and the Secretary-General's campaign to fight violence against women. The remarkable work of NGOs in the field in providing support to victims also deserves to be recognized.

Lastly, on a far more modest scale, I chaired in October a Security Council meeting in the Arria format with NGOs and several prominent women such as Mary Robinson, Betina Diop and Eve Ensler on the issue of violence in the conflicts in Africa, at which we began to consider ways of intensifying the fight against sexual violence.

This progress, commendable as it is, is obviously insufficient, however. We must scale up international mobilization. How? Several ways present themselves.

In the first place, as I said, the fight against impunity must be intensified, more than ever. This is the way to stop the scourge, bring peace and reparation to the victims, and protect the victims against their torturers. The international criminal justice authorities must systematically prosecute those responsible for these vile crimes just as the various national courts concerned must. There will be no prevention, no deterrence, without real sanctions.

We must have more data and information which are still fragmented at this time. It is essential for sexual violence to be the subject of specific follow-up in the reports of peacekeeping operations and a comprehensive report from the Secretary-General. In the same spirit, the establishment of a mechanism for gathering information on sexual violence has proved to be necessary. Why? Because a detailed knowledge of this scourge is an essential prerequisite for being able to tackle it methodically, especially by integrating this problem into the PKOs, on the lines of what was done for MONUC in the DRC.

Lastly, we must strengthen the practical application of UNSCR 1325. There will be no effective fight against sexual violence if women are not represented in sufficient numbers: in PKOs, the security forces (army and police), and in the ranks of judges of States directly affected by these crimes. Reforms in the security sectors of countries emerging from conflict must fully integrate this concern.

We must also use the possibilities we have in the Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict. This allows us to consider problem situations, to make recommendations and in the event the belligerents persist in non-compliance with these recommendations, to envision the adoption of sanctions by the Security Council. It is a unique mechanism of its kind, whose effectiveness on the ground is real.

This is why France advocates an extension of the Group's mandate so it can take up the issue of sexual violence against children independently of the existence, or not, of child soldiers in a given country. While this mechanism focuses primarily on children, it may however make a useful contribution to fighting sexual violence against women. One single figure will suffice to reveal the pertinence of such an approach: 40% of the women raped in the eastern DRC are minors.

In addition, we must develop programs to assist victims, offering them medical treatment and the prospect of rehabilitation, and also work with local communities to prevent victims from being stigmatized. You may be sure that France, which is the leading contributor to the ICC Victims Fund, will advocate for specific projects benefiting rape victims.

Lastly, the European Union will continue to make this issue a priority on both the political and financial levels. That is why France will seek the adoption of guidelines on violence against women, especially sexual violence, during its presidency of the EU which starts on July 1. Such

guidelines will enable our embassies on the spot to expand their action and also finance, especially through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, more specific projects outside the EU to help victims of sexual violence.

Mr. Secretary-General,
Madame Secretary of State,
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Several lines of action which I have just mentioned appear in the Council's draft resolution prepared by the American presidency and today presented for consideration by the Council members. I therefore hope that a strong text incorporating so far as possible the greatest number of suggestions will be adopted at the end of our discussions.

The universality of rights is true not only for men but also the other half of humankind too often scorned, namely women. Sexual violence should not be seen as inevitable collateral damage of armed conflict, and rape should not be justified, as I have heard it said, on the grounds of some cultural tradition or ancestral practice.

Sexual violence, and more particularly rape, is unacceptable, now and in the future, regardless of the perpetrator or the continent on which it takes places.

My country is proud to be the birthplace of one of the great voices in the cause of women. In this year of commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Simone de Beauvoir's birth, allow me to recall by way of conclusion one of her best known maxims: One is not born a woman, one becomes one. There is no fatality in it. Nothing condemns her to live on her knees. That is my profound conviction and I have no doubt you share it.

Thank you./.