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Women, Peace and Security: Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict

Statement on behalf of the European Union by

H.E. Ambassador Sanja Štiglic
Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the United Nations

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Please check against delivery

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

I would like to begin by commending USA presidency on the initiative to convene this thematic debate on "Women, Peace and Security: Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict". Today's debate presents yet another important opportunity to promote the effective, coherent and systematic implementation of resolution 1325.

Mr. President,

Please allow me to start with a remark made by one of the participants at the recent Wilton Park Conference on women targeted in armed conflict, who is also present at today's debate and who stated that it is more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier right now in Eastern DRC.

Women have always been particularly vulnerable victims during armed conflicts, but in modern history sexual violence has developed into a method of warfare. Encouraging though is that in recent years the international community has become more responsive to the plight of women in conflict and has acknowledged that the problem needs urgent attention.

Resolution 1325, linking gender equality to global security and acknowledging the importance of women's voices in building lasting peace, represents a milestone on the road to more gender-sensitive peace processes and security policies.

European Union attaches great importance to the situation of women in armed conflict. We believe that local, national or international actions in order to be successful and sustainable in any field, including that which is intended to bring development or peace, must involve and empower women.

Despite this growing awareness, current efforts are not effective enough to protect women in conflict situations. The positive role that women can play in conflict-affected societies is also not receiving the attention it deserves. We must considerably strengthen our efforts to guarantee the protection of women and girls in conflict-affected societies and to ensure their full and equal participation in peace processes at all levels, including negotiations and decision-making, insisting that women be fully engaged in all humanitarian, reconstruction and development programs.

The European Union believes that the best way to promote women's rights and women's empowerment and respond to the needs of women is through a gender-sensitive approach. Human rights and gender issues are being mainstreamed in our development cooperation policies. The European Commission Communication of last year on gender equality and women's empowerment in development cooperation had a specific emphasis on fighting gender-based violence, including rape as a war crime. In partnership with UNIFEM, we are working to build capacity and improve accountability for gender equality in our partner countries, with a specific focus on women in peacebuilding and the

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilization and Association Process.

implementation of UNSCR 1325. Through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, we supported women's participation in peace processes in Colombia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. Furthermore, the EU Initiative for Peacebuilding will be exploring ways to ensure the effective implementation of UNSCR 1325 by the international community, governments and local civil society organizations.

Furthermore, on 6 March 2008, the Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner brought together over 40 international women leaders to discuss the role of women in stabilizing an insecure world. They agreed to work for new momentum behind UNSCR 1325.

We also have a strong commitment to mainstream gender equality in the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). For the EU peacebuilding and reconstruction plans should include comprehensive victim-protection and support mechanisms, therefore, particular emphasis is given on measures against sexual and gender based violence. All ESDP civilian and military missions now aim to include a gender advisor. In the EU context this includes the development of rules of conduct as the Generic Standards of Behaviour, which are binding on ESDP staff, forbidding involvement in sexual exploitation, trafficking in women and prostitution.

Mr. President,

Resolution 1325, among other, calls for gender-sensitive forces and accountability for sexual violence and other abuses.

Sexual and gender-based violence is an area of particular concern to women and girls in armed conflict situations, although we know now that also boys and men may be subjected to such violence and to sexual torture. Violence against women and girls, including rape and sexual slavery, is often used as a weapon of war, in order to demoralize women themselves, or the community they belong to. Importantly, high levels of sexual and gender-based violence also rarely cease at the end of hostilities, and continue well into the 'post-conflict' phase. Moreover, boys who have watched their mothers and sisters being raped run a considerable risk of becoming perpetrators themselves.

Examples from recent past and unfortunately at this present moment show the extensiveness and severity of sexual violence against women in armed conflict. Between 1991 and 2002, all parties to the conflict in Sierra Leone perpetrated rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence against Sierra Leonean women and girls and at least 250,000, perhaps as many as 500,000, women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Very few perpetrators of these crimes have ever been brought to justice while thousands of women infected by HIV/AIDS due to having been raped years ago continue to suffer and die. Today armed groups in the DRC are using sexual violence as a weapon of war to terrorize the populations. In Darfur too, women and girls continue to be affected by high levels of gender based violence and sexual crimes including rape, while impunity remains a serious problem.

The short and long-term costs of sexual and gender-based violence were largely underestimated and ignored in the past, and there still remains a lack of co-ordinated and effective action. It is surrounded by a culture of silence and impunity, and the range and complexity of the underlying causes make it a difficult issue to address, particularly in conflict-affected situations where judicial and security institutions are weak.

Durable peace and reconciliation are heavily compromised if the perpetrators of such acts are not prosecuted. Impunity for perpetrators and insufficient response to the needs of survivors are unacceptable. The grave violations of women's human rights, through massive rape and other sexual violence require the immediate attention of organizations like the International Criminal Court and other relevant tribunals. Furthermore,

international and national courts should have adequate resources, access to gender expertise, gender training for all staff, including judges, and gender-sensitive programs in order to more effectively prosecute those responsible for such crimes.

There is a strong need to develop and promote innovative approaches that turn women as victims of rape into rape-“survivors”. Such approaches should ensure their safety and support their access to justice as well as actively support their economic empowerment through income-generating activities. Furthermore, they should also ensure adequate care, recognizing their sexual and reproductive health needs including for obstetric and gynaecological care, for the physical and psychological damage caused by the violence.

Determined action and leadership at the international and national level and resources will be required to eradicate gender based violence. Strengthening the protection of women and girls in conflict-affected societies from rape and other forms of sexual violence should be important enough to translate the many calls for such a mechanism into concrete action. In this context the European Union supports the important efforts of 12 UN entities already undertaken within the framework of Stop Rape Now – UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict.

On this occasion, the European Union reiterates its strong commitment to the zero-tolerance policy with a firm belief that under no circumstances can gender-based violence be condoned in peacekeeping or other UN-led operations. There should be no impunity for gender based violence in the UN. Every UN peacekeeping mission should include as a priority the protection of women and the safeguarding of women peace builders and include information about sexual and gender based violence in their regular reports to the Security Council. Furthermore, it is essential that all military and civilian personnel serving on UN peacekeeping missions receive training on the protection and rights of women.

In this regard, the EU welcomes the adoption of the Policy Statement and Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel.

Furthermore the EU strongly encourages all Member States to develop national action plans or other measures to implement Security Council resolution 1325.

Mr. President,

The European Union hopes that the SC will adopt a strong and action oriented resolution as an outcome of this SC thematic debate and expresses its support for developing an effective and comprehensive system-wide approach for addressing the issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict with clear monitoring and accountability mechanisms. It is imperative for international organizations, national governments and civil society to work together to identify priorities and to develop a practical approach, with particular emphasis on monitoring and reporting mechanisms, that would put resolution 1325 in action, ensuring that gender perspective be incorporated from the earliest stages onwards.

Thank you.