

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820
Thursday, June 19, 2008

Statement by H.E Mr. Hill, Representative of Australia to the United Nations

Australia would like to thank you, Mr. President, for including this issue on the Council's agenda.

Crimes of sexual violence are among the most widespread and egregious of all violent acts committed during armed conflict. We note with regret and disgust that sexual violence is often perpetrated by parties to a conflict. 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 behaviour and demands that the impunity of perpetrators of 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 mobilize them urgently.

As we are all too aware, crimes of sexual violence are also, in some circumstances, perpetrated by United Nations personnel. Any act of sexual violence or exploitation by United Nations personnel undermines the credibility of the United Nations in times of crisis. More than that, it is a gross breach of trust. The role of United Nations peacekeepers in the protection of civilians from all violence, including sexual violence, is an important one. There is a strong need to develop clear guidelines to ensure effective implementation of that task.

The role of police in peacekeeping operations is also of fundamental importance. Australia provides its police with training and guidance on sexual violence and also provides predeployment training to police forces from regional countries for missions such as the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands. We also recognize the important role of women in peacekeeping missions, whether they be military, police or civilian personnel. Almost 20 per cent 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 such crimes and, in situations where they have occurred, to prosecute them. The absence of an effective system to prosecute United Nations 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 its own nationals to account.

Community education, including by non-governmental organizations, 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 also important elements of such education. It is also essential that victims of sexual violence have effective and equal access to justice, and that national systems, including appropriate national legislation, be in place to ensure effective judicial outcomes.

This is an important issue which requires the full attention of the international community. We urge the United Nations 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 predeployment training for all personnel, including those bound for United Nations missions. We cannot stand by and allow these violations to continue.