

**Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (Sexual Violence) 23rd of February 2012, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Mr. Mehdiyev, Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations*

At the outset, I would like to thank the Togolese presidency for convening this important open debate on women and peace and security. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Margot Wallström; the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Hervé Ladsous; and Ms. Amina Megheirbi for their statements.

Civilians are entitled in all circumstances to respect for their persons, their honour, their family rights, their religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs. They are to be at all times humanely treated and protected, especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof. The reality, however, is different. Indeed, a defining feature of most, if not all, conflicts is still the failure of parties to respect and ensure respect for their obligations to protect civilians. Civilians continue to suffer from inadequate protection in situations of armed conflict, including discriminatory treatment, torture, sexual violence, extrajudicial executions, mass population displacements and ethnic cleansing.

In many situations of armed conflict, sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war to strike terror and to force civilians to leave their native lands. Azerbaijan strongly condemns all acts of violence committed against women and girls in situations of armed conflict. It is imperative that all parties to armed conflict strictly abide by their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. Azerbaijan's interest in the issue under consideration is obvious and stems from its efforts to contribute to achieving sustainable peace and development and its practical experience of addressing the impact of armed conflict on civilians, including women and children. In three days, we will commemorate the twentieth anniversary of atrocious crimes committed against the Azerbaijani civilians of the town of Khojaly, where during one night hundreds of civilians were killed only because they were Azerbaijanis. Not even women and children were spared by the invading troops. In its resolutions adopted in 1993 in response to the occupation of Azerbaijan territories, the Security Council referred specifically to violations of international humanitarian law and attacks on civilians. We are confident that consistent measures being taken at the national level, as well as the existing international legal framework, will serve to bring to justice those responsible for crimes in Khojaly and other grave offences committed during the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories. It is incontrovertible today that no official or political status cloaks the person concerned with immunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community.

The adoption by the Security Council of the landmark resolution 1325 (2001) was an important milestone that took up the issue of women and peace and security as a separate thematic issue and brought international visibility to the plight of women and girls in situations of armed conflict. The subsequent Council resolutions, presidential statements and other relevant documents have contributed to developing a solid framework and raising awareness of the impact that sexual violence has on victims' families and societies. The heightened vulnerability of civilians in wartime — in particular forcibly displaced persons, refugees, women and children — brings an element of urgency, dedication and strong commitment to our protection efforts, which must be free of selectivity and politically motivated approaches and preferences. Azerbaijan notes the role that the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict must play in that regard. Among the pressing issues requiring urgent action and attention is that of women taken hostage and reported missing in connection with armed conflict. We are continuing our efforts to address that disturbing phenomenon, including through the relevant biennial resolution of the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women, of which Azerbaijan is a main sponsor. In that regard, I would like to recall that, *inter alia*, at its fifty-fourth session, the Commission called for the immediate release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts, including by strengthening international cooperation to that end. More resolute and targeted measures are required to end impunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community, including those committed against women in situations of armed conflict. Combating impunity is important not only for the purposes of prosecuting such crimes and bringing those responsible to justice, but also for ensuring sustainable peace, truth and reconciliation.