

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

*Statement by H.E Mr. Jorge Urbina, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations*

I would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, and your delegation for convening this important debate. I also thank the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the ministers that have taken part in this debate for their presence. I would like to welcome the presence of Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro and Her Excellency Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa.

Without a doubt, the twenty-first century should be the century of women. Despite all the progress made during the last century, women crossed the threshold of the third millennium bearing the heaviest of all human burdens. We are very clear that this is not the forum in which to advocate for the emancipation and empowerment of women, but we welcome today's meeting as an opportunity to debate the issue of violence against women in situations of armed conflict. On this day and in this place, we are witnessing a convergence of efforts to make war more humane and to ensure that women everywhere enjoy their full status as human beings.

Two weeks ago, a group of Council representatives visited a number of camps for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There we heard the voices of women who spoke of the sufferings of war, the murder of their comrades, the massacre of their children and the violation of their bodies. Their experiences oblige us to ensure that today's debate does not conceal the reality of the pain, humiliation and outrage behind technical language.

This must be a debate that truly responds to the wish expressed by those women. None of them spoke to us of revenge; rather I recall them speaking to us of their hopes, their desire to return to their homes and their dream of living in a safe and secure environment. I also recall them expressing the hope that they will never again be victims of further violations and outrages.

We must come away from today's debate prepared to learn to prevent. Hitherto we have focused our efforts on suppressing violence against women in situations of armed conflict and on fighting impunity. We have limited ourselves to seeking to carry out security sector reform — and not always with great success. Although our efforts to end impunity through action by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the ad hoc tribunals, are important and indeed indispensable, they are not sufficient. We must now enhance what we have been doing and must learn to create prevention mechanisms; that will be a complex and difficult process.

If we truly want to be effective and to help women in times of conflict — women in Africa, women in the Balkans, women everywhere, the women of today and tomorrow — we must undertake the difficult task of engaging in prevention. I say it is difficult because prevention is not the same in all places or in all cultural contexts. I say it also because prevention cannot be tackled only from the standpoint of the woman: that would amount to making her out to be guilty of her own pain. Violence against women in war and in all other contexts can be prevented only from the standpoint of the perpetrator.

Violence against women in situations of armed conflict cannot be understood or prevented if it is analysed only through the prism of sexual violence. We are witnessing abhorrent methods of warfare; these are weapons of terror whose victims are not only the direct casualties but also their families and their communities. We must not trivialize this phenomenon, for that would be to continue to fail to prevent it and to respond to it effectively. It is indisputable that sexual violence, when carried out in a systematic and widespread manner and is part of an attack against innocent populations, exacerbates an armed conflict and becomes an enormous obstacle to its resolution and to peacebuilding.

For that reason, Costa Rica pointed out during last month's debate on post-conflict peacebuilding convened by the United Kingdom (see S/PV.5895) the need for all peacekeeping operations to be conceived as integrated missions bringing together all United Nations efforts, including the contribution of the Peacebuilding Commission. Only in that way will we be on the road of prevention, able to provide an enduring response to this problem, one which has prevented women from fully playing their important role in preventing and settling conflicts and in building peace.

