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STATEMENT by
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the United Nations

- Security Council-
Open debate
Women, Peace, and Security

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Mr. President,

I would like to extend my appreciation to the Ghana presidency for holding this open debate on women, peace and security. Croatia has aligned itself with the statement made by Portugal on behalf of the EU, but I would like to add a few points of my Government on the matter.

The Security Council unanimously passed the SCR 1325 seven years ago to address the impact of war on women and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. A recent assessment of women's participation in peace processes as official negotiators and formal representatives, found that women remain largely excluded from conflict mediation.

Various case-studies suggest that peace agreements, post-conflict reconstruction and governance have a better chance of success when women are involved, in part because women have a more inclusive approach towards security and address key social and economic issues that might otherwise be ignored.

Let us not forget that in all countries women's work burdens are generally much heavier than men's, leaving less time and energy for involvement in political life. It is therefore vital for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women to increase women's participation in politics, so that two tenets of Millennium Development Goal 3 can be reached.

Mr. President,

Croatia strongly believes that women in conflict situations need special attention by this powerful UN body. Both the Report of the Secretary-General on the girl child and the Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflict, state the same thing; traditional attitudes towards girls in societies limit their right to express their views, girls seeking asylum, refugee and internally displaced girls are in need of special protection from physical or mental violence. Committee on the Rights of the Child noted with concern the lack of effective measures to prevent and prosecute perpetrators of violence against women and girls by military personnel, including foreign military personnel, stationed in military bases.

Beginning in childhood women face discrimination which ranges from lower levels of education to prevailing social attitudes doubting their competence as decision-makers. Although children in general have been recognized many rights, it is interesting to note that while 185 countries are parties to CEDAW, this Convention contains among the highest number of reservations of any UN treaty, underscoring world-wide resistance to women's rights.

Mr. President,

Ensuring that women have a greater voice in household and community decisions is critical to fulfilling their rights as well as the rights of children. Women will beyond doubt insure systematic inclusion of children's concerns in peacemaking and post-conflict phases. If women's and children's rights are not explicitly part of the discourse at those critical stages, it is likely that they will not be addressed as they deserve.

Women's exclusion from peace negotiations and drafting of constitutions as well as from effective reforms in the security sector, governance and rule of law means that their rights and views, not only as victims but also as citizens and former combatants will not be fully represented in post-conflict reconstruction stages. Let us not forget that even among child soldiers up to 40% are girls.

A recent report examining 13 peace agreements reached between 1991 and 2001 that put an end to conflicts all over the world, among others, concluded that "there is no peace agreement that provides an overall model for appropriate provisions ensuring that the needs of women are served alongside those of men".

At the end of the year 2006, women representatives from the Ministry of women's affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan paid a visit to Croatia in the framework of cooperation between the two countries. As Afghanistan women representatives stated, the goal of their visit was to gather experience from Croatian women in dealing with war and post war situations. As they explained, the 70% illiteracy and unemployment are among the greatest problems of their society. These are some of the reasons why men turn to drug abuse and family violence which often leads to self-inflammation of women.

This example shows that in the last decade women across the world managed to become increasingly involved in conflict resolution processes. There has also been significant progress in the UN system in terms of policy reforms, norm setting and institutional development. However, a large gap between policy and practice, particularly at the country level still exists.

Mr. President,

Croatia participates in 15 UN peacekeeping operations with 7% female peacekeepers and is implementing zero tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse in field operations. The recent election to non-permanent seat of the Security Council is one of the biggest foreign policy achievements and recognitions for Croatia since its gaining of independence. Croatia's candidacy was a project that encompassed the entire state administration system and we are proud of the fact that at the time of election to the Security Council Croatian female high officials in diplomacy had been instrumental in the process.

Croatia welcomes the fact that the Council's attention was seized with an issue of ensuring stronger accountability mechanisms for the integration of SCR 1325 into the country-specific and related thematic work of the Council. Croatia would welcome if Security Council would consider establishing a dedicated monitoring mechanism that would increase the Council's contribution to preventing and prosecuting violence against women in armed conflicts.

Thank you.