

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Statement by H.E Mrs. Jadranka Kosor, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of the Family, Veterans Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity of Croatia to the United Nations

Thank you, Madam Secretary of State, for presiding over this meeting today. I would also like to welcome the presence of His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim and other distinguished colleagues around the table.

At the outset, Madam President, I wish to thank you and the United States presidency for the opportunity to discuss the issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Croatia, as a country which has been exposed to the horrors of war, strongly believes that the Council must give its undivided attention to this phenomenon, which poses a serious threat to international peace and security.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence against women are heinous crimes that in past decades have often been used as a method of warfare. The existing culture of impunity must be overcome. Today, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Sudan and Somalia, and elsewhere, women continue to be targeted by warring parties during war and in post-conflict periods.

The Council had the opportunity to witness the plight of civilians, including women and girls, during its recent mission to Africa. Having been briefed by my ambassador, I am all the more certain that more needs to be done by all of us in order to find justice and a decent life for victims of conflict.

The use of sexual violence creates an atmosphere of insecurity and helplessness, with devastating effects. The number of girls in school continues to fall and women and girls are exposed to HIV/AIDS and are stigmatized in their communities. The persistence of rape in situations of armed conflict is a sad reminder of our obvious failure to provide security and protection to women and girls in conflict and post-conflict countries.

Speaking from the experience of Croatia, it would be remiss of me not to mention what we, Croatian citizens, have witnessed of this heinous practice. Even on Croatian territory, in the heart of Europe, rape was used as a method of intimidation and terror during the aggression to which Croatia was exposed at the beginning of 1990s. Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had been tormented by the same source of aggression, suffered the use of rape and sexual violence as an instrument of ethnic cleansing.

I therefore believe it is my obligation to warn the Council that these crimes must never — I repeat: never — escape the arm of justice. For this reason, the International Criminal Court at The Hague, as well as local courts, must be the last instance of justice for the victims and a reminder that there can be no tolerance for the crime of rape.

We are aware that the response of national communities in conflict areas to sexual violence against women and girls has been inadequate. Combating sexual violence requires well-planned preventive measures at a national and international level. We are of the view that Governments should ensure the participation of women from the early stages of negotiating peace and in reconstruction efforts. Women must also be given the possibility of being elected to political office, while support mechanisms for newly elected women must be ensured.

However, without ensuring women's physical safety and economic security through social norms, efforts to engage them in decision-making processes will not succeed. Due to a lack of such norms, we have witnessed the assassination of many women human rights defenders worldwide.

My delegation would also like to reiterate the commitments set out in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (General Assembly resolution 60/1) as well as in Security Council resolution 1674 (2006). Peacekeeping missions must have strong, clear and goal-oriented mandates, including the authorization to use force if necessary to protect civilians.

In this context, Croatia strongly condemns all acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by all categories of personnel in United Nations peacekeeping operations. We call upon all troop-contributing countries to take

preventive measures, including predeployment awareness training, and to investigate and prosecute all perpetrators of sexual violence.

In the framework of its commitment to international peace and stability, Croatia is increasingly involved in contributing to international peacekeeping missions, currently 15 in all. Moreover, Croatia has specific guidelines that regulate its participation in peacekeeping operations. We are strongly committed to a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation by peacekeeping personnel.

Woman's role in peacekeeping is unique, prompting an increasing demand for its presence. It is our policy to deploy women to missions, either as members of the Croatian armed forces or the Croatian police. Women have been engaged on a range of issues where the female point of view or their presence makes a difference, including providing support for civil society or addressing problems of family violence.

Allow me now to inform the Council about progress achieved at the national level. Following our election as a non-permanent member to the Security Council for the period 2008-2009, we are ready to take a proactive role in the promotion of the initiative of safeguarding women's right in conflict situations and strengthening women's role in post-conflict peacebuilding. Furthermore, through our national policy for the promotion of gender equality, special measures for achieving the integration of the gender perspective in national security policy and the promotion of resolution 1325 (2000) are being implemented.

Also, as an example of good practice between the Government and the non-governmental sector, I would like to mention that the Government Office for Gender Equality has given support to the non-governmental organization project on women's experiences of war, entitled "Women recollecting memories: the gender dimension".

At the regional level, we would like in particular to stress the experience we gained in wartime. As is known, among the refugee population more than 50 per cent of the people are women and girls. In July 1992, Croatia was hosting 341,000 refugees, among whom 80 per cent were women, children and elderly people. Croatia provided for all shelter and food, as well as providing temporary protection status and medical insurance. Assistance from specialized agencies such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF was valuable. As a consequence of war atrocities, we in Croatia still host 1,600 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Croatia is a part of a region that in the recent past has suffered as a result of armed conflict. We are fully aware of the role that both the Security Council and the international community can play in addressing sexual violence against women and girls, especially when this is used by political or military leaders as a means of achieving political or military objectives.

We believe that the Security Council needs to provide strong and effective leadership on this issue, including by taking concrete action when necessary, with the ultimate aim of eradicating this abhorrent behaviour.