

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
November 30th 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Mikec Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations.

We thank the Indian presidency for holding this debate on the specific role of women's civil society organizations in conflict prevention and conflict resolution and recovery — the first on this particular issue.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

The issue of the overall empowerment of women has a special place in both the internal and external policy of the Government of Croatia. We deem the role of women's civil society organizations to be an indispensable part of those policies. A perception of women as victims often obscures their significant role in conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding processes, as well as the significant role of women's civil society organizations worldwide. The implementation of our national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security is therefore one of our priorities.

With regard to enhancing the specific role of women's civil society organizations in situations of armed conflict and peacebuilding, I would like to underline that legislative, judicial and public awareness- raising measures are part of the synergy of the process. In our experience, one of the best ways to bring into focus the specific role of women in the area of peace and security is certainly by strengthening relevant legislative measures and institutional frameworks, particularly in the judiciary and education, together with gender mainstreaming efforts and gender training programmes within State administrative bodies.

However, the existence of laws does not guarantee their exercise in practice, in particular in traditionally conservative societies and cultures. Therefore, the closer cooperation of State bodies with broad layers of society and the more intensive involvement of men in all gender equality promotion activities remain essential. Finally, all such efforts can succeed only with the full and honest cooperation of Government bodies with women's civil society organizations, which is crucial to increasing and improving public awareness.

Moreover, empowered women's civil society organizations not only play an important external observer role in State measures, but also can direct State actions according to the real needs of women citizens. It is therefore essential to encourage and support Governments and civil society organizations to work jointly to create targeted campaigns, seminars, forums and workshops aimed at raising public awareness and knowledge of the importance of the greater participation of women in all activities and decision-making processes related to peace and security.

In our view, an indispensable part of the whole process is the development of focused and concrete regional cooperation. An example from our own region of South-East Europe is the Regional Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in Southeast Europe, established in 2006, which has grown into a respected, internationally recognized, strong lobby group for women. The Lobby is a real-life example of women contributing to their own empowerment and inclusion in peace and security matters and decision-making processes. It is fully supported by Croatia's and other States' highest officials.

The honest commitment of Governments to women's civil society organizations is essential, particularly in the context of armed conflict, post-conflict situations, transition periods and the withdrawal of United Nations missions. There must be a commitment to giving proper attention to gender equality issues, with appropriate levels of security and protection and sufficient funding. All such measures involving coordinated efforts of State bodies and women's civil society organizations should also contribute to a safer environment for women's human rights defenders and activists.

Our common efforts in enabling women and women's civil society organizations to participate in all activities of conflict prevention, peace processes and rebuilding societies is of the utmost importance, as their role is vital in fostering sustainable peace and stability. Croatia has stood and stands ready to engage actively with relevant women's civil society organizations and their respective Governments to share with them our positive experiences and practices in conflict, post- conflict and transition, in support of our joint efforts.