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**THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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55th Session of the General Assembly

**Open Session of the Security Council
"Women and Peace and Security"**

**STATEMENT
BY H.E. MR. SOTIRIOS ZACKHEOS
AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

New York, 24 October 2000

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Mr. President,

Although my delegation has aligned itself with the statements of the European Union representative, I would like to make a few remarks on the item under discussion.

I would like at the outset to express my appreciation to you for convening this open meeting of the Security Council on this most important and relevant subject of 'Women and Peace and Security'. This initiative of the Namibian Presidency confirms the principled and important role that Namibia, and you personally Mr. President, hold on international issues and, in particular, in the promotion of human rights. We welcome this initiative as yet another step forward in the efforts of the international community, as expressed through the open discussion in the Security Council, of matters pertaining to conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building.

Mr. President,

The most tragic aspect of armed conflict has been the heavy toll that civilians usually bear when caught between opposing armies. The proliferation of conflict in many areas of our planet and the gross violations of the most basic human rights of civilians have been a major concern to the international community, as testified by the open debates that took place in this very room concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the protection of children and the protection of humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations.

The most negative aspect of armed conflict, with both short-term and long-term effects, is the plight of the most vulnerable groups of civilians, namely women and children. During armed conflict the effect on families and traditional ways of life can be devastating. Great numbers of women, not only are in constant threat of sexual violence and death, but often have to endure the loss of parents, children or husbands, and are forced to assume the role of the main breadwinner and carry the heavy economic burden for the survival of their families. It is imperative for the international community, and constitutes a special duty of the Security Council, to assist and protect these women and children. The Security Council should always take into consideration, in its response to such crises, their situation and suffering and pursue solutions that are always based on its resolutions. We hope that this open session of the Security Council will lead to practical measures on the role of women in peace-building and on humanitarian issues and protection of women during peacekeeping and post-conflict support operations. One way to achieve this would be the establishment of an independent panel of experts with the participation of the Secretariat, relevant agencies and civil society.

Mr. President,

One of the areas which my delegation places utmost importance is the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons. The painful experience of the displacement of almost one third of the population of my country in 1974 has demonstrated to the government and the people of Cyprus, the central role of women in post-conflict and peace-building situations. Their role in facing the adverse consequences of war and displacement and in rebuilding our economy, despite their suffering, has been immense. That is why we fully support the position that women's rights, during and following armed conflict, must be safeguarded and their participation in the efforts for the rebuilding of war-torn societies be supported with every means possible. In this respect we fully subscribe to the recommendations proposed by UNIFEM and in the significant report entitled *'The impact of armed conflict on children'* prepared by Ms. Graca Machel, to whom I take this opportunity to express the deep appreciation of my delegation.

Another issue, which I would like to stress with regard to the positive developments that have taken place in the last few years on the accountability of human rights violators, is the question of impunity. Cyprus warmly welcomes the efforts undertaken by the community of nations to finally put an end to impunity, as demonstrated in the inclusion, in the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, of the obligation to prosecute those responsible for the crimes of rape and sexual violence in civil war, as perpetrators of grave breaches of international humanitarian law. The inclusion, as a war crime, of all forms of sexual violence against women in the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court has been a major achievement in ending impunity for these abhorrent crimes.

Mr. President,

The representative of the Secretary-General of the UN on internally displaced persons, estimates that forty million people live today as refugees or internally displaced persons. Close to 80% of these people are women and children. Their drama and their vulnerability do not usually stop with the end of armed conflict. The vast majority of them continue to face the threat of violations of their human rights long after the conflict has ended. The phenomena of sexual exploitation and trafficking and child labor, including the use of children as soldiers, are realities that we cannot ignore. That is why it is of extreme importance that the rights of women in post-conflict situations be secured through constitutional means so that the injustices and suffering inflicted on them not be allowed to continue. Their contribution to rebuilding their societies is important and must be guaranteed.

One final point, Mr. President, that I would like to make, is the issue of the gender dimension in the approach of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as, other actors involved in peacekeeping, peace-building and reconciliation efforts associated with situations of armed conflict. My delegation strongly supports the inclusion of a gender perspective in the provision of humanitarian aid and in the reconciliation efforts following ceasefire agreements. We would also like to pay tribute to the crucial role played by non-governmental organizations in highlighting the issue and providing practical assistance on the ground.

Thank you Mr. President.