

Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
Tuesday, 24th October 2000, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Mr. Hussein, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations

I would like to thank you, Sir, for presiding over this very important open debate of the Security Council on the question of women and peace and security. It is true that issues concerning women are dealt with in different forums, especially in the fields of development and human rights. We believe that this open debate of the Security Council — the result of an initiative under your presidency — will also enable us to exchange views on the situation of women in armed conflict, an issue that is within the mandate of the Security Council.

I fully endorse the thrust of Mr. Kofi Annan's opening statement yesterday. I also take this opportunity to welcome the statements of Ms. Angela King and Ms. Noeleen Heyzer for reminding us how far we have yet to go in addressing the perils faced by women during war and also during so-called periods of peace, when many crimes are often committed, too. It is not just periods of conflict that we must consider.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and other United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), must be commended for their direct support for women in conflict situations and for their work in bringing women's voices to national, regional and international decision-making arenas. In particular, UNIFEM's role in facilitating the All-Party Conference in Arusha and in putting forward Burundian women's recommendations for the final peace agreement, highlights their innovative and unique approach.

More specifically, Ethiopia believes that a full-scale assessment of the impact of armed conflict on women and of women's role in peace-building is long overdue. We hope the Council will recommend such a follow-up to today's debate. We have full confidence in UNIFEM's ability to support this process, drawing on other United Nations funds and programmes and the important work of civil society.

We are not short on knowledge of where we are deficient in fully meeting the rights of women in all their aspects. Therefore, I will not repeat what others eloquently stated yesterday better than I could. Most States, including mine, have legislated for equality between men and women. Yet, if we look at the very parliaments and legislatures that did that, we will see that equality between men and women is lacking.

Recently, we held the second multi-party elections in my country. Twenty million people voted, of which half were women. Yet, only 10 per cent of the 540 members of parliament elected were women, despite the fact that in some electoral districts 80 per cent of the voters were women. In the previous parliament, women constituted only one per cent of its membership. In the executive branch, the situation is relatively better, but much has yet to be done. This will require continuous but determined efforts by both women themselves and men who genuinely believe in equality between men and women.

Equality will not drop from the sky — one must strive to achieve it. Over the years, and especially under Mr. Kofi Annan, the United Nations has made considerable progress in this area. In a few agencies, the number of women in senior positions surpassed 30 per cent some years ago. In two or more, 50 per cent has been achieved. Hence, while more can and should be done, it is time that we, the Member States, including mine, follow the example set by our world Organization. Perhaps the best place for the Member States to start is in this chamber. Perhaps we can let the countries of the Permanent Five set the example by sending women as their representatives. Some may say there might be too many of them, but we have had too many men for over five decades. So it will not hurt if we start with the next lot of Permanent Representatives. The rest of us should not be far behind. For my part, I will strive for my successor to be a woman Permanent Representative as soon as possible.

I say this because, if we do not have women represented in sufficient and equitable number at all levels — all levels — of society, then no amount of wisdom-filled statements in the General Assembly chamber or elsewhere will bring peace and security to women in particular and humankind in general. For our part, we in Ethiopia are committed to pursuing diligently the small gains we have made and will build on them. Globally, too, we can all do it.

In the spirit of the Millennium Summit, let us talk less and act more, since we say we know what needs to be done. In this context, I share completely what Ambassador Penny Wensley of Australia said in her concluding remarks late yesterday afternoon.