

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820
Thursday, June 19, 2008

Statement by H.E Mr. Christian, Representative of Ghana to the United Nations

I join previous speakers in commending the delegation of the United States for convening this timely open debate, which seeks to address the grave sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. We welcome the presence of United States Secretary of State Rice and Deputy Secretary- General Asha-Rose Migiro.

This gathering reinforces our shared belief in the inherent dignity of every human being whether in time of peace or in time of conflict. Indeed, the inclusion of a range of sexual violence offences in the Statutes of both the International Criminal Court and the ad hoc international criminal tribunals was itself a strong affirmation of our shared value that there should be no tolerance for impunity.

As expressly set out in the concept paper prepared by the United States (S/2008/364, annex), there are practical challenges that we have to grapple with in order to make meaningful progress in dealing with gender-based and sexual violence, which remain an important part of resolution 1325 (2000), considering the almost daily and disturbing reports on rape and other forms of sexual abuse emanating from several of the conflict situations in the world, particularly in Africa.

Improving the response to the scourge of sexual and other forms of violence against women poses a great challenge, particularly to developing countries, which are the major troop contributors. This challenge calls for fresh thinking aimed at finding more appropriate measures to enable the United Nations to discharge its mandate more effectively and with maximum flexibility and efficiency. As the representative of a major troop-contributing country, allow me to briefly share my Government's experiences and its perspective on ways to improve the response of peacekeeping personnel to the scourge of sexual and other forms of violence against women in situations of armed conflict.

We wish to emphasize that women peacekeepers serve as role models and encourage girl soldiers and victims to embrace programmes to disarm former combatants and generally have a salutary and positive impact on security sector reform, electoral support and gender mainstreaming in broken societies where women are even more marginalized.

Troop-contributing countries must take responsibility for deploying well-trained peacekeepers. The term "well-trained" must be redefined to include having gender awareness. Gender training should also take place in national staff colleges; it should be realistic and based on exercises, case studies and split- second decision-making.

Greater representation by women is therefore required not only as a matter of principle, but also as a practical matter, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of peacekeeping. In this respect, Ghana has made concerted efforts to increase the integration of women in its armed and security forces and would endeavour to deploy more women as peacekeepers. One innovative strategy Ghana endorses is fostering closer coordination between public institutions that deal with peacekeeping and those that deal with women's affairs. We must put security institutions in closer working relationships with women's organizations.

We underscore the importance of security sector reform as an essential element of peace and security. But to be sustainable, such reform must be gender- sensitive. Women are the glue that holds families and communities together, even in the midst of war. There is a need for greater recognition of the roles women play in peace consolidation, and they should must be consulted in all activities undertaken on their behalf and be equitably represented in strategic responses to violations.

Better liaison with women's constituencies can improve access to operational intelligence and can serve as force multipliers in the achievement of mission objectives. Increasing women's voice in security and governance structures can help weed out the root causes of violence and discrimination. Gender- sensitive protection efforts should be recognized and rewarded to help ensure that peacekeeping forces accord high-priority to the protection of women and girls.

Failure to prosecute is a licence to rape. Consistency in prosecutions and in referrals to justice mechanisms shows that the Security Council takes this matter seriously. All perpetrators and would-be perpetrators must know that the international community, particularly the Security Council, is watching and is ready to act to end impunity for sexual violence. States should review and, when necessary, revise or create applicable laws to ensure that sexual violence against women is always criminalized.

Bolstering the role and capacity of both the United Nations and regional security institutions is also essential. Our region, for example, has benefited from action at the regional level. The African Union has demonstrated its zeal in helping to end conflicts on the continent, and cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union has been positive and should continue to improve and give meaningful protection for women.

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) is premised on the twin pillars of protection and empowerment. National-level responses must ultimately aim at reducing women's economic vulnerability and dependence as well as their exposure to exploitative relationships and sexual abuse. In that connection, protection should not only be a reactive, band-aid solution; efforts should be made to empower women and girls in the long term.

As clearly stated by the Secretary-General in February 2008, at the launch of a multi-year campaign to end violence against women, Member Governments, the private sector and civil society can effectively support increased actions on the ground to end such violence, prevent this affront to humanity and ensure that women and girls have the right to a life free of violence.

Ghana, for its part, will do all that is possible at the diplomatic, policy and operational levels, as we have done since the dawn of United Nations peacekeeping, to bring about the desired change and impact on peacekeeping operations, aimed at ending sexual violence against women. We also take note of the provision to strengthen access to justice and services for survivors of sexual violence as well as the emphasis on regional cooperation.

Ghana believes that the draft resolution to be adopted at the end of this debate constitutes a good basis for our work, and we support the recommendations contained therein. We are particularly pleased to recognize the emphasis on the role and conduct of peacekeeping missions, including related recommendations for troop-contributing and police-contributing countries.