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STATEMENT

by

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on

Women and Peace and Security

at the

Security Council

New York

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Mr. President,

I thank you for holding this Security Council open debate on Gender and Peacekeeping to mark the third anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. I also wish to thank the senior UN personnel who have provided us with valuable introductions to the topic at hand.

The critical importance of this issue stems from the fact that civilians are increasingly the victims, sometimes unintended and sometimes intended, of the violent conflicts that occur in different parts of the world today. It has been estimated that close to 90 percent of current war casualties are civilians, the majority of whom are women and children, compared to a century ago when 90 percent of those who lost their lives were military personnel. Although entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict, women and children are particularly affected because of their status in society and their gender. Despite this, women should not be viewed solely as victims of war. They assume the key role of ensuring family livelihoods in the midst of chaos and destruction, and are particularly active in the peace movements at the grassroots level and cultivating peace within their communities. However, the absence of women at the peace negotiating table is unconscionable.

My delegation had supported many of the recommendations made in the report of the Secretary General pursuant to resolution 1325. We welcome, in this context, the decision to appoint a Gender Advisor in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

Mr. President,

Armed and other types of conflicts and terrorism and hostage taking still persist in many parts of the world. My country has been the victim of a vicious campaign of cross-border terrorism for two decades resulting in the deaths of at least 63,000 persons, mainly civilians, women and children. On 27 October, the first day of Ramadan, 1 person was killed and 34 injured in the state of Jammu & Kashmir when a grenade was indiscriminately lobbed into the public telecommunications centre where people were lined up to pay their bills.

The campaign of terrorism and intimidation sought to be enforced on an unwilling citizenry in the state of Jammu & Kashmir has been compounded by the misguided zealotry of the fundamentalists who have launched a terror campaign specifically targetting women for their so-called non-observance of strict moral codes. In an area where society has traditionally placed no such restrictions on their women, and in which women have played an important role, the externally-foisted and forced imposition of such social codes can only impact adversely on society in general, and women in particular.

It is our experience that terrorists exploit the vulnerabilities of women in situations where violence prevails and normal life and livelihoods are disrupted on account of terrorist activities. Perhaps those that direct and sponsor terrorist activities are aware that women, as the most vested interests in favour of a stable and peaceful society, foster values that go against violence and terrorism.

Moreover, when provided the opportunity to mobilize themselves through democratic processes, women have been at the forefront of initiatives towards the consolidation of peace and security. One consistent factor in democratic elections in different parts of India has been the preponderance of women among voters. The success of elections in Jammu & Kashmir last year can be partly attributed to the high turnout of Kashmiri women desirous of utilizing this democratic exercise to empower themselves with the means to provide for a more secure and stable environment. It is implicit that their participation would also foster and strengthen activities that combat terrorism.

In Afghanistan, women are finding their rightful place in society. The violence of the gun has largely given way to a more peaceful and settled existence for a large part of the population. An entire generation of women who were denied their right to education and work by those represented by the Taliban are now pursuing educational and professional opportunities. Unfortunately, the same religious fundamentalists have now diverted their attention to other parts of the world, including the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir.

India recently undertook the largest democratic decentralization exercise when it provided grassroots level *Panchayats* (locally elected self-governing bodies) across the country with decision-making powers. As at least one-third of all *Panchayat* members in India are women by statutory law, this decision has opened up the opportunity to Indian women to lead on peace and security issues from grassroots levels. Undoubtedly, the voice of women towards inculcating systems that foster peace and security in a country of a billion people, will impact far and wide.

Mr. President,

Women and children constitute some 80% of the world's millions of refugees and other displaced persons. They are threatened by deprivation of property, goods and services and their right to return to their homes of origin as well as by violence and insecurity. We therefore support the Secretary General's recommendation on the reintegration of women through disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes as integral parts of all future peacekeeping missions.

The debate today has provided valuable opportunity for the Council and the larger membership to be updated and further sensitized to the important role that women can and should play in securing peace and international security. It is incumbent upon the UN to play its role in supporting and furthering efforts in this direction. We support the implementation of the Secretary General's recommendations, although as with all broad recommendations, these must be conditional upon circumstances and situations.

Mr. President,

The representative of Pakistan, in his statement, has chosen to make unwarranted and unsubstantiated comments on women in India. I have earlier drawn the attention of the Council to the invaluable role the political empowerment of women can play in inculcating values that serve as a deterrence to violence and terrorism. The stark contrast between Indian and Pakistani politics, seen in their historical and current contexts, can offer no better evidence of the differing politico-legal and social frameworks within

which each country views its women as a resource in addressing the issue of peace and security.

In an open letter dated 10 October 2003 addressed to the President of Pakistan, the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch has devoted one entire section to legal discrimination against and mistreatment of women and religious minorities in that country. The letter also addresses, inter alia, the issues of torture and mistreatment of political opponents and journalists, return to civilian rule and the Legal Framework Order and sectarian violence. The letter specifically records that inaction on the Hudood Laws persists despite the government-run National Commission for Status of Women calling for a repeal of the Hudood Ordinance on the grounds that it "makes a mockery of Islamic justice" and is "not based on Islamic injunctions". This, despite the outcry over cases such as the tribal "Jirga"-ordered gang-rape of Mukhtaran Bibi in Punjab and the sentencing to death by stoning of Zafran Bibi on grounds of adultery. Human Rights Watch has monitored these and other cases involving abuse under the Hudood laws. Informed estimates suggest that over 210,000 cases under the Hudood laws are under process in Pakistan's legal system.

Mr. President,

The above is just an illustration of the problems that women in Pakistan face. A State that is unable and unwilling to provide basic rights to its women is incapable of any sensitivity on the plight of women in other countries brought about by terrorist actions. Conversely, it reveals the ethos under which the sponsors of the regressive Taliban in Afghanistan have decided to use similar means to subdue a civilian population, particularly women and children, of another nation into succumbing to the threat of terror.

Thank you, Mr. President.
