

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (Sexual Violence)
23rd of February 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Mission of India, to the United Nations

Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, I would like to thank SRSG Margot Wallstrom for her comprehensive and valuable briefing and also for the report of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict. We welcome the SRSG's efforts and share the principles and objectives outlined by her. I would also like to thank the USG for DPKO and the representative of the NGO Working Group on Women and Peace and Security for their statements.

We think that the deliberations today will promote our common interest in the subject. Mr. President, India has been actively participating in the debates of the Council on the agenda item 'Women and Peace and Security'. This is a cross-cutting issue having multisectoral dimension, and requires the active participation of all Member States. I would, therefore, like to thank you, Mr President, and the delegation of Togo for organizing this open debate that affords an opportunity to Member States to discuss the progress made in the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 1820, 1888 and 1960 and contribute to our ongoing consideration of the subject.

Mr President, Today, it is estimated that close to 90% of current casualties in wars and situations of armed conflict are civilians, with the majority being women and children. Obviously, women bear a disproportionately large share of the burden of conflict, but have a marginal say in matters of war and peace. This is perhaps a function of the gender imbalance in our societies, reflected in positions of power and influence. Despite this, women should not be viewed solely as victims of war. They also have to 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. Therefore, the absence of women at the peace negotiating table is unconscionable. Mr. President, Some of the aspects highlighted by the landmark UNSC resolution 1325, in particular, the greater participation of women in areas of conflict prevention, peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction, are central to the issue. Some solutions would need to emerge from the conflict affected societies themselves. Others are more long term and structural. They involve, inter alia, the encouragement of democratic ideals and practices, effective improvements in the economic and social conditions, and expansion of opportunities for education and productive employment. Situations of conflict vary. Each has its own causes and consequences. Clearly, there cannot be off-the-shelf remedies or panaceas.

We need to take practical and effective steps to mitigate the impact of conflict on women and to enhance their ability to restore and preserve peace. Mr. President, It is a matter of deep regret that the international community has to repeatedly debate the issue of sexual and other forms of violence against women and girls in situations of armed conflict. This abhorrent behavior has to be unequivocally, unambiguously and resolutely condemned, whether perpetrated by the parties to the armed conflict or others. There should be no tolerance for gender-based violence. All such cases must be investigated and perpetrators prosecuted. Some argue that human rights law and international humanitarian law do not offer enough protection to women and children. Such postulation is a bit extreme. Women's rights and needs have received the attention they deserve in the codification of international law. The challenge is their effective implementation, and availability of adequate resources for capacity building wherever required. This alone will ensure the real impact of our efforts on the ground.

Mr. President, by definition, it is States that are parties to the treaty-based system of international law. By and large, they respect them, and when they do not, penalties arise through the provisions of the relevant treaties. The most egregious crimes against women in times of conflict, however, have been and are committed by non-state actors, often warring against governments; they obey no laws and are, as experience has shown throughout the last decade, immune to coercive and punitive measures. This Council, therefore, needs to consider, in practical terms, how the non-state actors, which are responsible for the bulk of the crimes that continue to be committed against women, can be effectively tackled.

Mr. President, On the UN side, there has been modest progress in areas such as gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations and training of peacekeeping personnel on gender perspectives. In this context, we commend SRSG Wallstrom for having brought a new synergy in addressing the issue of sexual violence in the situations of armed conflict. My country has taken a lead in this process and been conscious of the need to

incorporate essential elements of the gender mainstreaming policy in the pre-deployment training of its peacekeepers. India's formed police unit of 100 personnel in Liberia was the first of its kind among UN peacekeeping operations. As the largest troop contributing country in UN history, we are proud of the exemplary record of our peacekeepers. I might add that we are willing to increase our contribution of Female FPU's.

Mr. President, The Secretary General has, in his report, referred to efforts to establish a framework of early warning indicators with specific reference to sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. The UN has also come up with a set of indicators as global markers of progress in the implementation of Resolution 1325. We have taken note of these efforts. The development of such indicators, benchmarks and guidelines should involve a process of broad inter-governmental scrutiny and approval before their eventual adoption. In this connection, one has to be cognizant of the difficulty in obtaining credible and verifiable data from conflict situations.

Mr. President, India will continue to contribute positively to UN efforts in protecting vulnerable sections, particularly women and children, in conflict and post-conflict societies. I would also like to emphasize that the international community needs to enhance cooperation by providing new and additional financial resources, sharing of experiences, and capacity building in the areas of justice and the rule of law. Mr. President, The women and children in our lives assure our future. They must live in security. While there is much talk of the need to safeguard the interests of women and children, there is less talk of cooperative effort to ensure sustained economic growth which alone can eradicate the poverty and deprivation that cause their exclusion. Several studies point out that most of the global poor are women. Globalization has affected both men and women, but women bear the double burden of inequality and marginalization. Empowering them is, therefore, both crucial and urgent. In considering the role of women in peace and security, this Council, I am certain, will bear in mind this wider perspective of women empowerment, development and peace. I thank you.