



ITALY

ADDRESS BY
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ON "WOMEN, SECURITY AND PEACE"

SECURITY COUNCIL
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Mr. President,

It is a great honour for me to be here today to discuss the effect of conflicts on women and girls, and the key role that they can play in the peace process. Let me say first that Italy fully aligns itself with the statement that the United Kingdom on behalf of EU previously released.

Women are the chosen victims of modern wars. Par excellence, most of today's conflicts, are essentially internal ones, leading to political and economic chaos, human insecurity, and terrible suffering for the entire civilian population. Uncontrolled groups of criminals thrive in such an environment. These elements as a whole make women especially vulnerable. Indeed, in a growing number of cases, atrocities against women are used as a warfare tactic.

These are well known facts and the UN has taken steps to fight such patterns. Starting with Security Council resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000, and as recently as the latest report of the Secretary General, on Women and Peace and Security, published on October 10. Its action plan defines twelve fields of intervention, which are illustrated in the lengthy annexes to the report, indicating strategies, concrete steps, players, and timetables.

Moreover, the Declaration and Action Plan of the UNGA on *"Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century"* recognises that men and women are affected differently by armed conflict, making a gender approach essential when enforcing international human rights and international humanitarian law. An historic breakthrough is the International Criminal Court's definition of sexual violence against women as a deliberate instrument of war, to be treated, in particularly heinous cases, as a crime against humanity.

Mr. President,

Definitely women have a major role to play in peace-making and peace-building. As a consequence, a more systematic approach to gender mainstreaming should be taken in these processes. Practical guidelines based on lessons learned should be developed that indicate how to foster the full, active involvement of women in the rebuilding of institutions and of society. States should be urged to define national rosters of potential women candidates for positions in the areas of conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation.

In Darfur, Sudan, gender-based violence – mass rape and mutilation - is a common means used to uproot rural communities. In Chad, near the Sudanese border, women and girls fleeing the violence in Darfur risk being assaulted and raped by civilians or militia members while going about everyday tasks such as collecting water, fuel, or animal feed. Let there be no mistake: these acts are crimes against humanity, and should be classified as such. We thus strongly appeal to the Government of Sudan to do everything in its power to solve the humanitarian crisis in Darfur.

The end of hostilities does not always translate into the end of violence. Women in post-conflict situations have reported rapes, sexual assaults, and trafficking. The survivors often suffer from psychological trauma, permanent physical injury, and long-term health risks, especially HIV/AIDS. As we all have sadly learned, "The face of HIV is a woman's face."

Hundreds of thousands of women are still in refugee camps, face serious threats to their safety, or are forcefully prevented from participating in political activity.

I now wish to pay tribute to Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of Burma's pro-democracy movement and Nobel Peace laureate. This week marks the tenth anniversary of her isolation under house arrest. Her only crime, after winning the 1990 national elections, is having worked to establish democracy in her country, free her people, and promote civil and political rights. I ask again for her immediate release. Her immediate release is of paramount importance to restore a positive climate for national reconciliation.

Mr. President,

Women are not just the victims of armed conflicts. They are also combatants, leaders, negotiators, peacemakers, peacekeepers, and activists. Denying them their basic human rights is thus also a major obstacle to the reconstruction process. The Security Council's already mentioned resolution formally acknowledges their crucial role in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts, at the national, regional and international levels.

The potential of women in the reconstruction phase is remarkably clear, for example, in Iraq. Women there have fought for decades to gain their rights—to vote, to work, to dress and to be educated as they chose. What they need now are assurances that they will not be excluded from the process of democratization to which they have so much to contribute. This is why Italy has just started an ambitious training programme for Iraqi women professionals.

The experience of the European Union shows the crucial importance of involving female personnel in the whole peace process. The increased presence of women in the civilian, military and police components of peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, for example, has greatly improved relations with local communities and has facilitated communications with the most vulnerable groups: namely women and children.

Mr. President,

My personal experience suggests that a more proactive role for women in emergency situations can be better achieved when we take a comprehensive approach. This is what I have witnessed in Afghanistan, where Italy is the lead Country for the reform of the justice system. Where we pay special attention to projects and activities that safeguard the rights of women. Perhaps our greatest challenge is to assure that all the main legal and judicial programs promote gender mainstreaming and a gender perspective. This is a goal we strive to achieve by working closely with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, and the associations of Afghani women professionals. We are also defining a strategy to establish legal aid centres to allow women to exercise their rights. To assure Afghan ownership of the process, the Legal Department of the Ministry for Women's Affairs—which has been strengthened through capacity-building activities—has been asked to play a fundamental role.

Mr President,

Last but not least, women need to participate fully in post-war elections, which are a fundamental stage in reconstruction. Women must therefore be able to take part in them, on an equal footing, and be legally empowered to both vote and stand for election.

Here, too, the Afghan experience is enlightening. During two consecutive elections—the 2004 presidential ones and the 2005 parliamentary ones—the women of Afghanistan manifested their political awareness by turning out in overwhelming numbers at the polls and exercising a right that they had never known. In so doing, they broke with tribal customs—which kept women at home while only men participated in politics—and wholeheartedly embraced the opportunity to be directly involved in the making of the democratic state.

Mr President,

In closing, I cannot emphasize enough the strong link that exists between any peace process and the granting of full human rights - civil, political and economic - to women. The Secretary General's Report indeed is an example of the on-going progress in this field. Italy fully endorses it and will continue to support national representatives, members of civil society, all the international stakeholders working in crisis-stricken areas today, who ultimately are working, as we all are, to improve the life of women.

Thank you, Mr. President.