

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

Statement by H.E Ms. Fritsche, Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations

We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate and for the personal efforts of Secretary Rice on the issue of women and peace and security, in particular in the framework of the Women Leaders' Working Group.

We appreciate the careful preparation of today's meeting, including the early submission of a draft resolution. However, even though we are happy to sponsor the draft resolution, we would have preferred for the debate to have an impact on its drafting. We hope that future open debates will follow that example.

My delegation has supported resolution 1325 (2000) in its entirety ever since its adoption, and we believe that it has had a positive impact on the ground. Nevertheless, we agree with the assessment in the concept paper that progress towards achieving its major goals has been slow and uneven. In particular, the United Nations must appoint more women to senior positions with regard to preventive diplomacy, mediation and peace operations. This would have a clear impact on the topic under discussion today. Appointing more women to leading positions would, without any doubt, have a catalytic effect and empower women affected by armed conflict. It would strengthen the perception that women are stakeholders, as opposed to mere victims or aid recipients.

A few years ago, during my time as Permanent Representative in New York, I had the honour of heading a group of like-minded ambassadors aiming to increase the presence of women in such positions. The success of our cooperation with the Secretary-General in that regard then was very modest indeed and, several years later, it is sad to note that very little progress has been made, in spite of repeated expressions of good intentions from all sides. Nevertheless, we believe that resolution 1325 (2000) has, overall, had a positive impact on the work of the United Nations in this field, while its full potential has yet to be explored.

Sexual violence is one of the most important aspects of resolution 1325 (2000) and merits a separate discussion. While sexual violence has always been a part of armed conflict, its systematic and targeted use in numerous situations today is not just a by-product of hostilities or merely a war crime. It has become a method of warfare that aims to destroy the social fabric of communities in order to achieve political and military goals. The General Assembly addressed this trend as early as in 1995 by adopting resolutions on rape and sexual violence in the context of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the trend has continued unabated. The increasingly systematic use of sexual violence is part of a larger pattern. One of the main consequences of the changing nature of armed conflict is the increasing victimization and targeting of civilian populations, which puts women and girls at particular risk.

The protection of civilians must be an inherent task for all peacekeeping missions. This applies in particular to acts of sexual violence. Peacekeepers are currently providing protection, including against sexual violence, only on an ad hoc basis and under a flexible interpretation of their sometimes vague mandates. Future mandates must provide clear guidance, in particular to commanders, on how to protect civilians, including girls and women, from sexual violence. Resolution 1794 (2007) can serve as an example in this regard. Furthermore, predeployment and on-mission training programmes must instruct police, security and humanitarian personnel on how to recognize and react to incidents of sexual violence.

Sadly, girls and women in affected regions often associate uniformed personnel with sexual violence. It is therefore crucial to deploy more women in civilian components of peacekeeping missions, empower local women leaders and increase their role in all peacekeeping efforts.

Most important, those who are supposed to provide protection must never themselves become perpetrators. All acts of sexual violence committed by peacekeepers, including sexual exploitation of local woman and child prostitution, are unacceptable. Such acts heavily undermine the credibility and effectiveness of any given peace operation, but also of our Organization as a whole. Zero tolerance can be the only answer to such incidents. Indeed, the ultimate goal must be for the attitude and behaviour of peacekeepers towards women to serve as a model for local communities.

Very significant progress has been made over the past few years with regard to the issue of impunity. Both ad hoc tribunals established by the Council have made highly significant contributions in this respect. In the *Akayesu* case, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda established that rape, under certain circumstances, can constitute an act of genocide. The codification of sexual violence as internationally punishable crime occurred in the context of the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in July 1998. The explicit inclusion of sexual violence in the provisions dealing with war crimes and crimes against humanity was one of the many significant steps forward reflected in the Rome Statute.

Today, almost 10 years later, the Court is fully operational and is currently dealing with situations where sexual violence is rampant. One of them is the situation in Darfur, which the Security Council has referred to the Court. It is therefore clear that the parts of the draft resolution dealing with the question of impunity are indeed incomplete without a specific reference to the International Criminal Court. We think that the text would have sent an even stronger message if it had included such a reference. We also think that the Council should call for cooperation with all international tribunals and courts that deal with sexual violence.