

**Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2013, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Mr. Schaper, Permanent Mission of Netherlands to the United Nations.*

My delegation welcomes this debate and would like to make a few remarks in addition to the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union, with which my delegation aligns itself, and to others that have underlined the importance of the topic of women and peace and security.

The recent cases of sexual and gender-based violence in countries in conflict such as Syria and Mali continue to illustrate that fighting such violence remains a priority. It is evident that sexual violence exacerbates conflict and perpetuates insecurity. It holds entire communities hostage and has an economic, social, cultural and inter-generational impact. Women are excluded from communities and cannot engage in economic activity or access markets; girls cannot go to school safely.

Sexual and gender-based violence can be seen from two perspectives. On the one hand, we see women as victims of such violence, from the perspective of violence against women. On the other hand, however, we often tend to underestimate the role that women can play in finding solutions through conflict prevention, resolution and transformation — in fact, by using the reverse perspective, of women against violence. That capacity is underutilized, decreasing the effectiveness and likelihood of success of any peace and reconstruction process. The Netherlands recognizes that women play active roles as peacebuilders, politicians, activists and quite often also as combatants. We should listen, therefore, to the priorities that women define, and we should understand the barriers that women perceive. Their participation in finding solutions to conflicts and in reconstruction processes is indispensable.

The Netherlands considers sexual violence in conflict as a sign of a failure to implement all the elements of the agenda for women and peace and security. In today's debate, therefore, we would like to stress four points. First is the importance of taking urgent action in key areas, especially those of women's participation and equality and of prevention, response and accountability. Another important area is national and regional efforts to end impunity, including through referrals to the International Criminal Court, and by emphasizing the importance of reparations.

Secondly, we should give specific attention to the importance of providing effective support and protection to women-led organizations and defenders of women's human rights, particularly given the threats such defenders face and their lack of resources. Thirdly, there is a need for a comprehensive multisectoral response for survivors, including medical care, in accordance with international humanitarian law, and access to emergency contraception, safe abortion and HIV treatment, as well as access to justice and psychosocial health care services for women and girls. Lastly, and equally important, is strengthening the gender components of security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, not least through ratification and full compliance with the Arms Trade Treaty, which gives substantive attention to gender dimensions.

Through policies such as its human rights and gender strategies, the Netherlands pays particular attention to issues such as gender equality, women's political role and leadership, economic empowerment and ending trafficking of and violence against women in post-conflict countries and unstable areas. In that regard, we are actively implementing resolution 1325 (2000) through a second national action plan for 2012- 2015, signed by three Dutch ministries and 41 civil organizations. The plan focuses on six countries: Afghanistan, South Sudan, the Sudan, Burundi, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as on the Middle East and North Africa region. I will cite three examples.

In Afghanistan, a group of Dutch signatories to the plan are working with a local telephone and Internet provider to start a programme connecting poor rural women and men with more modern young people in large towns via an SMS platform. The objective is keep the rural poor better informed about national women's issues and to foster dialogue between them and urban young people on issues such as violence against women and the role women can play in fighting it.

My second example is that together with the Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women's Fund and the Human Rights Fund, the Netherlands supports many women's organizations in their struggle to combat violence against women. When women's political and economic empowerment is supported, their vulnerability to sexual violence is reduced. For example, the Netherlands has funded the Bell Bajao campaign, which combats violence against women with a very successful media effort. Started in India, it consists of small clips that are nested in various popular television talk shows and programmes such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. The clips have become very popular and have spread to other countries in the region.

My third example is that in the Middle East and North Africa region we have started, with a Dutch non-governmental organization and an accounting firm, a new fund with a budget of about €5.8 million, designed to strengthen the financial and organizational management of women's organizations in the region.

In conclusion, women can be powerful actors for peace, security, and prosperity. When they participate in peace processes and other formal decision-making processes, they can play an important role in initiating and inspiring progress on human rights, justice, national reconciliation and economic revitalization. They can also build coalitions across ethnic and sectarian lines and speak up for marginalized and minority groups. Investing in women's leadership is therefore smart security as well as smart development.