

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

Statement by H.E Mr. Onemola, Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations

On behalf of the Nigerian delegation, I would like to commend the United States presidency of the Security Council for having initiated this open debate on women and peace and security, with a focus on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

Let me reiterate my delegation's full appreciation of the concern raised in the concept paper on the endemic nature of sexual violence against women in situations of armed conflict, in particular the use of rape as a weapon of war.

My delegation views violent sexual acts such as rape, sexual assault, sexual slavery, forced marriages and forced prostitution are crimes against humanity. For us, these crimes are as despicable as they are condemnable, and it does not matter whether they are committed in time of peace or in time of war. Such crimes affect not only the victims, but also families and entire communities. They traumatize people and degrade lives, leaving behind stigma, humiliation and social exclusion.

We are equally worried that eight years after the adoption of landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which both serves as an action framework and reinforces other existing mechanisms, such as the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration, progress towards its implementation has been slow and uneven.

Indeed, the objectives of the resolution, including the need to enhance women's participation in decision-making, integrating gender perspectives into peacekeeping operations, protecting women from gender-based violence and mainstreaming gender into United Nations programme mechanisms, remain largely unfulfilled. The Nigerian delegation therefore welcomes this new milestone resolution, to be adopted later, as a follow-up to resolution 1325 (2000).

However, similar to resolution 1325 (2000), the critical challenge is how to ensure its steady and widespread implementation, particularly in conflict and post-conflict areas.

In Africa, the most significant achievements under resolution 1325 (2000) have taken place in post- conflict environments where women now enjoy considerably enhanced role in decision-making. Strengthened by the African Union's 2005 Protocol on the Rights of Women and the 2004 Heads of States Solemn Declaration on Gender Equity in Africa, a number of countries have scaled up women's participation in politics and decision-making.

Through specific measures such as a gender quota and a minimum threshold, some countries have accelerated the integration of women into national decision-making processes. Increasingly, women are also being included in national and continental peace and security initiatives.

Nigeria has signed and ratified the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. It has also taken special measures to guarantee the participation of women in governance and decision-making. At both the federal and State levels, efforts are being made to outlaw discriminatory customary or traditional practices that are harmful to the physical and mental health of women and girls.

The federal Government is also working closely with traditional rulers and non-governmental and faith- based organizations to change long-held attitudes and negative perceptions about women and to inculcate in young men respect for the fundamental rights of women and girls. School curricula and public enlightenment campaigns are also focusing on positive gender values, including the promotion of gender equality in all spheres.

The cumulative effect of those initiatives has led to a significant increase in the literacy levels of women and girls and in the number of women pursuing careers in male-dominated occupations. The country's national health policies and plans have also become more gender-sensitive, and, in the case of HIV/AIDS and other

infectious diseases, due consideration of the special needs of women have become standard policy objectives. Nigeria has also made remarkable progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals as they relate to women and children.

Notwithstanding these modest efforts, the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) in Africa's conflict environments remains fitful. The most critical challenge, as we see it, is the concrete implementation of special measures to protect women and children against sexual violence and the prosecution of those responsible for large-scale violations of women's rights.

Another important challenge is how to institutionalize gender-sensitive policies through the domestic implementation of relevant international conventions and mechanisms, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action to prevent violence against women.

In addition, the political will necessary for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) at the national and regional levels is not evident in many cases. The fact that there is no requirement in place to ensure the universal observance of relevant conventions and principles has created further room for inconsistency among States.

My delegation considers it imperative that these challenges be seen as constituting lessons learned that should guide the United Nations as it seeks to put an end to this unconscionable aspect of armed conflict. To meet these challenges, the international community must have a clear understanding of the multidimensional nature of the problem to enable it to take remedial action, as appropriate.

Our responsibilities must include preventing sexual violence against women, providing protection for them, assisting and caring for the children born of rape, including those who are victimized by the culture of impunity. Indeed, it is our responsibility to comfort and heal the communities savaged by these crimes.

More importantly, we must strengthen punitive measures so that perpetrators and those responsible for breaches are brought to justice. To enhance such measures, there is a need for greater participation by women in the civil and military components of multilateral peace support operations.

We would also like to see gender sensitive training imparted to male civil and military personnel to foster the awareness of gender issues. The need to integrate gender perspectives and training into peacekeeping in Africa is critical, considering that well over 80 per cent of United Nations peacekeepers are currently deployed in Africa.

I have elaborated on some of the challenges we face in protecting women from sexual violence in situations of conflict. There are more. For instance, we also need to strengthen dissemination, sensitization and monitoring mechanisms in conflict zones. Conflict monitoring and early warning systems are also needed to help avert the prevalence of sexual violence during and after conflicts. There is also a need to ensure effective monitoring of the implementation of humanitarian assistance in camps where women have been known to be especially vulnerable.

Health and education programmes should be developed to deal with the effects of sexual violence, such as HIV/AIDS and psychological trauma. Additionally, it is necessary to coordinate the efforts of the relevant agencies and bodies involved in these efforts by identifying the various actors, programmes and activities relative to resolution 1325 (2000) in Africa.

It is also important to make a clear commitment to move the implementation of the resolution forward. In this regard, we support the call for the Secretary-General to periodically report to the Security Council on the use of sexual violence against women in situations of armed conflict. We also invite the Secretary-General to utilize existing regional and subregional resources such as the Economic Community of West African States early warning systems and security architecture to strengthen the protection of women.

We also call on the United Nations to take a more strategic view of this problem, with clear, action-oriented commitments to ensure measurable improvements in the lives of victims.

The challenges we have outlined thus far are daunting, but they are well within our capacity to address. We can prevent sexual violence and protect victims because we all have a good idea what the problems are, and their physical and social costs.

My delegation believes that, by working together, we can also make perpetrators account for their misdeeds. Today's discussion is, therefore, a welcome first step.

Once again, we thank the United States delegation for initiating this dialogue and for laying before us a very helpful draft resolution. My delegation can associate itself with the draft resolution, and we expect others to do the same.