

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Statement by H.E Ms. Susan Rice, Permanent Representative of the United States and the President of the Security Council to the United Nations

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend invitations under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly; Major-General Patrick Cammaert, former Division Commander of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and His Excellency Mr. Yukio Takasu, Chairman of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Japan.

It is so decided.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 18 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa, in which he requests that His Excellency Mr. Ramtane Lamamra, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, be invited to participate in the consideration of the item in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. Unless I hear any objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Lamamra.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite His Excellency Mr. Lamamra to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/403, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United States of America.

I should like to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2008/364, containing a letter dated 4 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the United States transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I should like also to draw attention to document S/2008/402, containing a letter dated 16 June 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom transmitting the report of the Wilton Park conference, held from 27 to 29 May, on "Women targeted or affected by armed conflict: what role for military peacekeepers?"

With the forbearance of my colleagues, I would like to make introductory remarks on behalf of my country in my national capacity. As I hear no objection, I shall proceed; I promise to be brief.

Thank you all for joining us; I would especially like to thank the Secretary-General for his leadership. I should like to commend you, Mr. Secretary-General, for your commitment to increasing the number of women candidates for United Nations Special Representative and Special Envoy positions. When I, along with the members of the Women Leaders Working Group, first began looking at this issue, we realized that in the 60 years of United Nations peacekeeping, only seven women had held the post of Special Representative to the Secretary-General. You immediately took the lead in helping to address that, Mr. Secretary-General, and today Margrethe Løj of Denmark is now the Special Representative for Liberia. We applaud you for your commitment, and we look forward to working with you on that critical issue.

I also want to commend all of you here today, my fellow Council members, and I want to thank those who have travelled from afar to show their dedication to the important issue of ending the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as instruments of warfare. Rape is a crime that can never be condoned. Yet women and girls in conflict situations around the world have been subjected to widespread and deliberate acts of sexual violence. As many here are aware, for years there has been a debate about whether or not sexual violence against women is a security issue for this forum to address.

I am proud that today we can respond to that lingering question with a resounding “yes”. This world body now acknowledges that sexual violence in conflict zones is, indeed, a security concern. We affirm that sexual violence profoundly affects not only the health and safety of women, but also the economic and social stability of their nations.

The draft resolution before us establishes a mechanism for bringing those atrocities to light. Specifically, the draft requests that the Secretary- General prepare an action plan for collecting information on the use of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict and then report that information periodically to the Council.

We already know of the unimaginable brutality against women that exists in some parts of the world. In Burma, for instance, soldiers have regularly raped women and girls as young as 8 years old. I must note that what is also tragic in that country is that instead of being allowed to take the office of the elected leader of Burma’s Government, Aung San Suu Kyi is marking her birthday this very day under house arrest. We cannot forget, as we examine that issue, other women activists who struggle for freedom in violent environments.

We are concerned about the issue of women affected by violence across the world, in places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and many others.

As an international community, we have a special responsibility to punish perpetrators of sexual violence who are representatives of international organizations. Last year, there were reports of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers in several United Nations missions and by staff at the United Nations Mission in Liberia. The encouraging news is that steps have been taken to address that. One of the perpetrators is serving a sentence in his country, and several other cases remain under investigation. That situation should serve as a model for all countries contributing troops to United Nations operations. While the individual perpetrator is ultimately responsible for the abuse, Member States are responsible for disciplining and holding their troops accountable.

Finally, we must work together to provide the necessary protection and assistance to victims of sexual violence. In recent years, the United States has provided more than \$40 million to protect women and girls in Darfur and to provide for sexual violence prevention in response projects worldwide. We have also addressed the issue of sexual violence by devoting \$528 million over the last seven fiscal years to fighting human trafficking, another grave abuse of human dignity that is all too frequently committed against women and girls, especially in conflict situations.

One of the most important ways in which we must measure the value of our international community is by how effective we are in protecting, and providing justice for, the most vulnerable of our members. When women and girls are preyed upon and raped, the international community cannot be silent or inactive. It is our responsibility to be their advocates and their defenders. We are taking an important step today that will enable us better to meet that goal, and I want to thank you all for being here to show your strong support.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers that they should limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I welcome in particular the participation today of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon, and I

invite him to take the floor.