

Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
Tuesday, 24th October 2000, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Mr. Lavrov, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations

I associate myself with my colleagues in expressing pleasure that today you, Sir, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia, are presiding over this meeting of the Security Council. I would also like to thank the entire delegation of Namibia for their work in the presidency during October.

We very much appreciate the contribution made by your country, Mr. President, in promoting the noble aims of advancing the status of women. We are also grateful to Ms. Angela King and Ms. Heyzer for their statements, and particularly for the specific ideas that I am sure will be very useful in the practical work of the appropriate United Nations bodies and the Secretariat.

The words “Women”, “peace” and “security” combine harmoniously, because this harmony is predetermined by nature. However, while we have selected these three words for our agenda, we are today compelled to talk about other concepts, too, the combination of which is unnatural and yet occurs all too often in today’s world: women and war, women and armed conflict.

The Security Council’s mandate includes its central role in the maintenance of international peace and security. A resolve to strengthen this central role was forcefully proclaimed recently by our heads of State in the Declaration unanimously adopted at the summit meeting of the Security Council. The Council’s involvement in resolving a multitude of armed conflicts in various parts of the world gives us the difficult task of giving due attention to all aspects of crisis situations which pose a threat to international peace and security. In the context of discharging its primary Charter obligation, in recent years the Council has held a number of open debates and adopted some important resolutions on the protection of children, civilians and humanitarian personnel in armed conflict, and on the problems of post-conflict peace-building.

We must say that armed conflicts, wars of aggression and terrorist acts cause enormous suffering to women. They die because they find themselves in a zone of hostilities; they lose husbands, brothers, fathers and sons in war, and, lacking breadwinners, bear the full brunt of economic problems; and they fall victim to violence and wander around from one refugee camp to another. They need a sensitive approach and reliable protection.

But women, as has already been said today, are not merely helpless victims. They are an enormous strength and can provide invaluable assistance in reconciling belligerents and tending the wounds of war.

Women’s peace-making potential is just starting to become a reality, and we hope that its further development will be promoted by today’s discussion in the Security Council. We cannot say that so far the international community has turned a deaf ear to these problems. Recommendations and gender mainstreaming initiatives in the context of the application of international norms in the area of human rights and humanitarian law, initiatives to involve women in peace-making and peace-building, have been broadly reflected in the Beijing Platform for Action, in the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action and in the agreed recommendations on women and armed conflict of the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-fourth session.

Inescapable punishment for sexual violence against women in armed conflicts, whoever might be the perpetrator, must be meted out by the International Criminal Court. We are convinced that this body will dovetail harmoniously with the existing system for the maintenance of international peace and security — with a key role being played by the Security Council — by supplementing national judicial systems in cases when they turn out to be ineffectual. When Russia signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court on 13 September, we demonstrated our resolve, together with other countries, to try to end impunity for, inter alia, crimes against women.

The problem of women in armed conflict was also highlighted in the special session of the General Assembly held in June entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”. The comprehensive nature of the outcome document of the special session convincingly shows that resolving humanity’s challenges in all areas without the full participation of women is impossible. This applies to the

important role that could, and should be played by women in eliminating and preventing crisis situations, in the proper rearing of the younger generation, in developing a culture of peace and in the dialogue among civilizations.

There is no more reliable way to protect women from the horrors of war than eliminating conflicts from people's lives. This was the thrust of Russia's proposal to strengthen strategic stability, which calls for unity of action by the international community in the military, political, socio-economic, human rights and environmental-protection areas. As Russian President Putin stressed in his statement at the Security Council Summit on 7 September, in order to improve the crisis- prevention capability of the United Nations it is particularly important to uncover the underlying causes of conflicts, including economic and social causes, to develop a culture of crisis prevention and to focus more on anticipating events. This is the direct responsibility of the Security Council.

In trying to find answers to the severe challenges of our times, the Council should heed more closely women's voices and in its decisions pay closer attention to the gender perspective. We hope that such an approach will promote more effective protection of the rights of women and help in the attainment of the main goal: the creation of lasting peace on our Earth, so that nevermore the words "women" and "war", and "women" and "suffering" go together.