

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security – 29 October 2008
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SOUTH AFRICA

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): May I begin by thanking Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Mr. Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Ms. Inés Alberdi, of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and Ms. Sarah Taylor, of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. Their contributions to this meeting have been invaluable.

I have the honour to address the Security Council today on behalf of the member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), namely, Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and my own country, South Africa.

SADC takes this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his report contained in document S/2008/622, which provides an assessment of measures taken to enhance the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. We also take note of the assessment on the progress made in the protection of women against sexual and gender-based violence. The report also refers to resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence in conflict situations, which was unanimously adopted by the Council not long ago.

While women may be the first casualties of war, they remain active agents of change and play a meaningful role in the recovery and reintegration of their families. Women are also instrumental in bringing about democracy and reconciliation in post-conflict societies. It is for that reason that SADC welcomes this opportunity, on the eighth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), to participate in this open debate on the theme of “Women’s equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security”. This meeting provides us yet another opportunity to assess the concrete and specific efforts made in the implementation of the resolution at all levels and the role of the Security Council in such efforts.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women is one of the founding principles of SADC and is enshrined in the SADC Treaty of 1992. We have been greatly honoured by the leadership and important contributions of women in recent peace processes and negotiations in our region. We also take pride in the fact that, throughout our history, the women of Southern Africa have played a pivotal role in the liberation movements that brought about independence and democracy to many of our countries.

In our resolve to mainstream a gender perspective into all aspects of our lives, SADC heads of State signed the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development on 17 August 2008. That instrument has been hailed as an important step towards the empowerment of women, the elimination of discrimination and the achievement of gender equality and equity. In the context of peace and security, the Protocol stipulates that States parties shall endeavour to put in place measures to ensure that women enjoy representation and participation in key decisionmaking positions in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes by 2015, in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000).

Furthermore, the Protocol specifies that, in time of armed conflict, States parties shall take such steps as are necessary to prevent and eliminate incidents of human rights abuses, especially of

women and children, and ensure that the perpetrators of such abuses are brought to justice before a court of competent jurisdiction. Sexual violence in conflict situations is inextricably linked to gender inequality. We therefore need to advocate more strongly for the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts aimed at maintaining and promoting peace and security.

While SADC acknowledges that women and civil society organizations have been the driving force behind our efforts and achievements, we are committed to continue to strengthen efforts to address the challenges of peace and security for women. We therefore welcome the seriousness with which the Security Council continues to address the question. In that connection, SADC believes that there is a need for women's increased representation and participation at all levels, particularly in peacekeeping and peacebuilding and within United Nations field-based operations. Recommendations by the Security Council — such as to provide gender-sensitive training, establish gender components in peacekeeping operations, deploy more women peacekeepers and appoint more women as special representatives and special envoys of the Secretary-General — should be implemented. SADC urges the Secretary-General to strengthen his efforts to identify suitable female candidates for senior positions, including in the military and police services. In addition, Member States should nominate women candidates for inclusion in a regularly updated centralized roster, as called for by resolution 1325 (2000).

From our experience in SADC, we have learned that it is important to build solidarity among all stakeholders, particularly women. We therefore remain committed to working within a consultative and collaborative framework to find peaceful solutions to conflicts. To that end, we believe it would be important for women in local communities to be allowed to participate in finding solutions for the reconstruction and rebuilding of their countries. The equal need for the representation and participation of women in formal peace processes and at the negotiating table cannot be overemphasized. As the ones who are the first to suffer when there is conflict, women are often the ones who know when and how to rebuild the lives of their communities. Women should therefore be at the forefront of developing and implementing postconflict strategies and programmes.

In conclusion, I wish to state that SADC remains committed to the full and effective implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). We, as the international community, have an obligation to women the world over to ensure that their rights are promoted and their place in all aspects of the peace process is assured. It is their equal participation and their full involvement that will contribute to the effective maintenance and promotion of sustainable peace and security.