



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**STATEMENT TO THE
UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL**

BY

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ON

WOMEN AND PEACE AND SECURITY

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Mr President

1 Few leaders have had the honour and distinction of presiding over both the General Assembly and the Security Council in the same year. You belong to a small distinguished league. I am confident that your unique experiences with both the key organs of the United Nations will, result in an unusually productive session for the Council this month.

2 The decision of Namibia to place the issue of the role of women in peace and security on the agenda for the Council reflects Namibia's keen awareness of the impact of peace and security issues upon women. We are equally pleased that this discussion will not be one-dimensional. It will not just reflect women's traditional role as victims of war but also, more recently, as key victors in several peace processes. The role of women has changed significantly in the twentieth century. The Council should recognise this.

Victims of War

3 Clearly, over the course of human history, more men than women have died in armed conflict. But women have also suffered in countless way. Mothers grieve when they lose sons in battle; so do wives when they lose husbands. We saw this most recently in Bosnia when men were separated from women and brutally slaughtered.

4 Women have also suffered more directly. Over the ages, women have been victims of direct and immediate physical injury in armed conflicts that range from rape, forced prostitution, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, abduction and slaughter. Women also make up the majority of refugee and IDP populations that result from the outbreak of conflicts. Downstream consequences of sexual violations, loss of male family members, eviction from their homes impose incalculable burdens on the women, which may last several years after the end of the conflict.

5 Those barbaric practices must come to an end. One of the greatest contributions of the twentieth century was to clearly spell out the norms that should govern armed conflict. But as the ICRC recently observed:

"If women are subject to so many of the tragic repercussions of armed conflict, it is not from any shortcoming in the rules protecting them, but rather because the laws are not observed. International humanitarian law grants wide-ranging protection to women. There are more than 560 articles in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their additional Protocols of 1977, which protect both women and men, as civilians, and also as combatants who have fallen into enemy hands. Among these, more than 40 are of specific concern to women."

6 In a similar vein, the Report of the Secretary General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts¹ of 8 September 1999 also states that:

"The protection of civilians in armed conflict would be largely assured if combatants respected the provisions of international humanitarian and human rights laws."

7 The tragedy we face today is that these norms were written on the assumption that armed conflict would take place between well-trained and well-disciplined armies, which could be schooled in the rules of war. Unfortunately many combatants today are young and lack the basic rudiments of education. In a speech to the Council in April this year, we quoted from a booklet published by the ICRC entitled, "International Humanitarian Law: Answers to Your Questions":

".. the lack of discipline among belligerents, the aiming of civilian population as weapons flood the territory and the increasingly blurred distinction between combatants and non-combatants often caused confrontations to take an extremely brutal turn, in which there is very little place for the rules of law."²

¹ Document S/1999/957

² page 20

8 Realistically, we could do little to try to educate such combatants on the civilised rules of war. The only solution is for the international community to deliver robust responses when major infractions take place. This is too large a subject to be covered in this debate. But we are pleased that the Summit Meeting of this Council endorsed in general the Brahimi Report. If the Council can now follow through with deeds that matches its words, all victims of armed conflict, women as well as men and children, will benefit enormously.

9 The resolve of the international community to tackle the issue of impunity should be demonstrated by meting out swift and effective justice to those who violate universally accepted norms. Indeed, the death penalty would be both an appropriate judicial response as well as a key deterrent to prevent such a recurrence. The International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia and Rwanda, which the Council had established in response to the widespread violations of international humanitarian law, had done much good work. Unfortunately, many key perpetrators remain unapprehended. Many have not even had charges filed against them. The wheels of justice have to be seen to be moving more swiftly if they are to provide any deterrence at all.

Victors of Peace

Mr President

10 One major change between the second half of the twentieth century and earlier times is the growing recognition that women can play an effective role in ending or resolving conflict. You expressed this well, Mr President, when you addressed a gathering on the occasion of the International Women's Day on 8 March 2000:

"Women know intimately the horrific welfare and bloodshed that they face in conflict zones, but they also know the conditions that need to be met to ensure that the peace in their countries is sustainable, equitable and just. Women and children are the first victims of conflicts. Is it any wonder, then, that women are uniting to end

conflicts that destroy the lives of their loved ones, as well as their communities? Women are half of every community. Are they, therefore, not also half of every solution?"

11 UNIFEM should be commended for highlighting the significant contributions women have made towards both achieving and consolidating peace. I would recommend that we read carefully UNIFEM's publication entitled "Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference". It has captured well many examples of the achievements of women all over the world in fostering the conditions for peace and stability. Let me quote a few examples:

12 In South Africa, women formed a strong National Women's Coalition that cut across racial, social and political lines, which contributed in no small measure to South Africa's success in establishing a democratic government today. In Northern Ireland, another women's coalition, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, which drew their membership from the Catholic and Protestant communities, also succeeded in galvanising the grassroots and securing a seat at the peace table. In Guatemala, women's voice and visibility in the peace process were achieved again through the existence of a cross-party and cross-sectoral women's coalition. The exertions of their sisters in Georgia, Palestine and Cambodia - often in difficult and even hostile environment - have also led to positive outcomes. This morning, Mr President, we have seen a video presentation of the determination of the women of Burundi in their efforts to contribute to the peace process. Their courage should set an example for us all.

13 Having praised the contributions of women towards peace, I hope that I will be forgiven for introducing a slightly politically incorrect note. It is true that women have often sought peace. But it is also true that women have on occasions displayed equal propensity to encourage human rights violations. When they were not in positions of leadership, as wives, women have sometimes supported and participated in the evil deeds of their husbands. Lady MacBeth was certainly no solitary exception. As we reflect on this issue, we may have to acknowledge that neither vice nor virtue is gender based. Nor is it confined to young or old.

14 In considering how we can better harness the potential of women playing a role in enhancing peace and security, Mr President, we should therefore be honest and realistic. In not all situations have women marched for peace. Some have marched for war. We see this on our CNN screens daily. To achieve real peace and security, we must gain the commitment of both men and women to enhance peace.

15 To our mind, the surest way of developing and sustaining peace is to make all citizens of the society stakeholders in peace. For this reason, issues of development cannot be divorced from peace. Those who live in abject poverty, and many do, have no vested interest in pursuing peace if peace fails to uplift them. The temptations to loot, pillage, rape, murder grows more acute when there is little to lose. But a population that believes that tomorrow will be better than today will be more inclined to pursue peace. Peace and development should therefore be seen as two sides of the same coin. Both women and men can and should play an equally important role.

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