



SRI LANKA

Statement

by

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Security Council Open Debate
“ Women and Peace and Security ”

United Nations, New York.
October 26th, 2010

(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President,

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to participate in this important debate. Also, we appreciate the briefings by the Under Secretary General for UN Women, the Under Secretary General for DPKO, the President of ECOSOC and the Civil Society Representative.

The adoption of the Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), ten years ago, was a landmark in our efforts to recognize the women's contribution to the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and their specific needs and concerns during and in the aftermath of armed conflicts.

Today's debate in many ways would be an assessment of the evolution of this issue, as well as an opportunity to identify the challenges ahead. Although the devastation stemming from armed conflicts does not discriminate along gender lines, it is known that women and children, particularly girls, often experience a disproportionate share of the harm during and in the aftermath of armed conflicts.

It is known that in the context of some armed conflicts involving non-State actors, young girls are often forced into early and underage marriages and, early pregnancies, in order to avoid forcible recruitment into the fighting ranks by non-state actors. Such practices pose serious health implications for the young mothers and their children. The practice of recruiting young women and girls as suicide bombers, undoubtedly a viciously obnoxious practice, not only snuffs out their worldly aspirations but also deprives their communities and societies of their productive contributions. The perpetration of sexual violence against women which leaves them debilitated psychologically and, in most instances, physically.

In post conflict environments, the challenges faced by women remain formidable. Often they are forced to contend with family dislocations, social ostracism and shattered livelihoods. Some face the everyday reality of being single mothers. In many ways, a level playing field in terms of gender equity continues to elude women in post conflict contexts as well. These are serious issues that call for the urgent and undivided attention of the international community.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka, having grappled with a virulent form of terrorism perpetrated by the LTTE, is fully cognizant of the despicable reality that once clouded the lives of the young girls and women in the North and East of the country. You would recall that Sri Lanka had to intervene in this august Council's deliberations under Resolutions 1539 and 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict, to focus attention on the abhorrent practice of child recruitment for combat by the LTTE terrorists, and the deployment of young women as suicide bombers.

With the defeat of terrorism in May 2009, through a massive humanitarian rescue mission, the Government took concerted action to rehabilitate and reintegrate all former child combatants. Among them, 351 were girls. Knowing that these children had been forced to take up guns instead of school books, the Government of Sri Lanka adopted a prudent, practical and compassionate approach towards their reintegration. Such an approach was based on the principles of women empowerment, livelihood training, psycho-social support, and above all, restorative justice. For those who missed the opportunity of experiencing a childhood and a formal education, arrangements have been made through the "catch up schools" to enable them to complete the General Certificate of Education examinations, irrespective of their current age. The state and society view them as victims and not as perpetrators. The lessons learnt and the good practices adopted by Sri Lanka in the arduous process of rapidly restoring the future of these children, deserve appreciation. Ours is a success story that has no parallel elsewhere.

With regard to former adult LTTE cadres, the Government has placed a high priority on their social and economic reintegration. In recognition of this priority, a vocational/technical/language training programme under the "Accelerated Skills Acquisition Programme," (IT, heavy machinery operation, electrical, mechanical, the specific apparel sector, etc.) has been developed. This is intended to enable their gainful participation in the various employment opportunities that are being created with the ongoing massive infrastructure and other development projects in the North and the East.

Further, with a view to harnessing the potential of social integration and social development of these former combatants, the Ministry in charge of rehabilitation, in collaboration with the Hindu Congress and the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation, organized a wedding ceremony for 53 couples who wished to get married. 53 houses were constructed for the newly weds to complete their rehabilitation programme as husband and wife.

Mr. President,

We are mindful of the challenges before us on the larger subject of women, peace and security. At the policy level, programmes have already been identified to address the critical issues facing women and girls in the post-conflict phase. We are especially focused on the special needs of thousand of widows and orphans. However, resource limitations are a challenge in our efforts to accelerate and implement the envisaged ameliorative programmes for these segments of the population. We sincerely thank our friends in the international community for their generous support towards the livelihood development programme for the country's war widows.

Despite the resource challenges, it is nevertheless heartening to note that the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report 2010, ranks Sri Lanka at number 16 on Gender Parity, and I quote,

"Sri Lanka is distinctive for being the only South Asian country in the top 20 for the fourth consecutive year. Sri Lanka's performance remains steady as it maintains the same rank as 2009. In addition to higher-than-average performance in education and health, Sri Lanka continues to hold a privileged position regarding political empowerment". End quote.

Mr. President

Sri Lanka would be conducting a national population census in 2011 for the entire country. This is the first time that such a countrywide census will take place since 1981. The census would pave the way, to adopt gender disaggregated methods to address data gaps in areas such as women and girls with disabilities and their access to educational and health services. Such focused census taking would facilitate the development of policy inputs to initiate and strengthen programmes for women and girls in areas that have escaped adequate policy focus. There is no doubt that such consolidated action would further empower women and girls in post -conflict Sri Lanka.

Mr. President,

We believe that the proliferation of small arms increases the risk of interpersonal violence, including domestic and societal violence, which often continue after conflicts. Hence, curbing the spread of small arms would be a step in the right direction in minimizing gender based violence. As Resolution 1325 extensively focuses on the women's role in peacekeeping and peace building, Sri Lanka stands ready to extend its support to achieve gender parity in UN Peacekeeping activities and in carrying out the gender related mandates of the Peacekeeping Missions. Necessary background, including, pre-deployment training, has been completed to deploy an all female battalion comprising 855 personnel and 28 female officers, at any given time. Sri Lanka is also willing to share its experiences in this area with other countries in need of such assistance through relevant UN agencies.

Mr. President,

We remain hopeful that the Council would make every effort to ensure that the indicators proposed for the implementation of Resolution 1325 are also acceptable to and achievable by all Member States. This is especially so given our varying levels of development and prevailing socio-economic conditions. We wish to caution however, that, as one third of the proposed indicators in the Secretary-General's Report are qualitative in nature, a balanced, transparent and objective approach is exercised in the selection of data. Also, it is important to carefully design, through extensive consultations, the methods that would be used to verify the quantitative data. After all, it is the collective responsibility and objective of all of us, Member States, to ensure a world free, safe and fair for all women and girls.

I thank you, Mr. President.