

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, (Conflict Related Sexual Violence)
23 February 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E Osman, Permanent Representative of Sudan

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the subject of women and peace and security. Twelve years have passed since the Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) on this issue. A global plan of action has been adopted in connection with the resolution, along with normative indicators to gauge progress and a time frame for achieving objectives at the regional and international levels.

The Sudan began taking steps to enhance the status of women as far back as 1954. Sudanese women participated in the first Sudanese Parliament in 1954. That early achievement was carried forward, with women serving as full-fledged members of the next Sudanese Parliament in 1964 as well. Building on that trend, the Sudan has applied the principle of equal pay for equal work since 1967.

Yet more gender-related legislation has been enacted since then. For example, the principle of gender equality in pension age was established in 2003. The status of women took a qualitative leap forward in the domain of political participation in 2008, when an election law was enacted stipulating that women must hold at least 25 per cent of the seats not only in the Sudanese federal Parliament but also in all 10 state Parliaments. In the Sudan, there is a federal Parliament in the capital city of Khartoum and there are 10 state Parliaments, one in each of the 10 federal states. Twenty-five per cent of the membership of all these parliaments is held by women through direct, free elections.

We cherish and take pride in that progress in the Sudan. It indicates the importance we attach to promoting the status of women in our country. The Vice-President of the federal Parliament of the Sudan is a woman, and a full 66 per cent of our civil service is composed of women, making men a minority in the service. In the judiciary, there are 80 female magistrates, some of whom have become Supreme Court justices. In the field of diplomacy, many women have taken on the title of Ambassador and represent the Sudan in many of our diplomatic missions.

On the basis of these examples and this short introduction to the progress we have made in enhancing the role of women in the Sudan, let me now move on to the main focus of our discussion here today. We reject and stand firm against all practices of injustice and violence against women. In 2007, we adopted a national strategy that was developed in consultation with all relevant official and civic bodies, including governmental entities and representatives of civil society, including the civil society representative who sits on my right side here today. We appreciate her role in this regard.

The national strategy adopted in the Sudan encompassed six areas of focus for measures to enhance and upgrade the status women, including peacebuilding and the preservation of rights, participation in decision-making, economic development, education, health, the environment, and dispute settlement. The strategy has been applied at all federal and state levels. The Government of the Sudan has established numerous specialized centres at all levels to coordinate the efforts of women in the fields of peace and development and to provide opportunities for consultation on promoting gender equity and the principles of equality.

I would also like to note that specialized national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and resettlement programmes in the Sudan give special priority to the situation of women, in coordination with the relevant United Nations agencies. We take this opportunity to acknowledge in particular the valuable collaboration we have had with UN-Women and that agency's role in translating the contents of the aforementioned plan of action into reality.

Today's debate on the subject of women and peace and security has included a presentation of the Secretary-General's report on sexual violence in conflict (S/2012/33). Among the 20 States it mentions, the report also refers to my country. I wish to say the following in response.

We welcome the reference contained in the report to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, describing it as a step forward in the comprehensive peace process in Darfur.

As is well-known, Darfur is one of the regions of the Sudan that is affected by conflict. The report includes a call on the non-signatory movements to cease hostilities and join the forward march towards peace. I mention this for the benefit of those who are unaware that violence against women in Darfur is fundamentally and actively caused by the armed movements that are intent on preventing the establishment of peace and security in Darfur. To camouflage those facts, they sometimes dress in military uniforms in order to convey the erroneous perception that the official military is responsible for perpetrating such violence.

We had expected the report to reflect the calm security situation and the decrease in violence, although that reality had been previously reflected in reports of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations presented at various meetings of the Security Council.

Paragraph 54 of the report contains a reference indicating that some of those who perpetrate violence against women, as I mentioned, have been dressed in military uniforms. That reflects an inaccurate perception that can only be dispelled by unambiguously confirming that the perpetrators belonged to armed rebel movements.

Last year, the President of the Republic of the Sudan, Omer Hassan A. Al-Bashir, invited a number of heads of State and Government, senior national officials and officials of international organizations to celebrate the inauguration of the Transitional Authority in Darfur — the successful result of the peace accords signed in Doha. Clearly, that development has contributed to the calm situation. The Security Council must now send strong signals urging the movements to join the promise, and punish those that refuse to join the march towards peace in the Darfur area.

Last month, there was another positive development with the Sudan's establishment of its national human rights commission. A woman with more than 30 years of judicial experience was appointed commissioner. A special court was also established in Darfur. A prosecutor general was appointed to examine all alleged violations perpetrated in Darfur since 2003, including violence against women. That is also an concrete, positive development. All of the perpetrators of violence against women will be brought to justice in fair trials, and will be punished accordingly.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the situation of women in armed conflict is inextricably connected with the coordinated and integrated tackling of the root causes of conflict. We therefore reiterate the need to address the root causes of conflict. The Security Council, as custodian for the concept and maintenance of international peace and security, must address the root causes of conflict, and not only the obvious manifestations. War is war — whether it erupts due to economic reasons or natural disasters — and it affects the most vulnerable and the poorest members of society, including women.

In that connection, we appeal to the Council to bring further pressure to bear on the armed rebel movements in Darfur, Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states to accept the principle of negotiation with a view to achieving a permanent solution through peaceful means, as the Government of the Sudan has agreed to do as it endeavours to achieve a solution.

We hope that the measures to be taken by the Council will rely on the country reports presented by States, as well as accurate information contained in the periodic reports of the Secretary-General, and not on reports produced by certain mass media sources or by non-governmental organizations. In that regard, we encourage the United Nations and its missions to organize workshops and direct consultations with officials of conflict-affected States, with a view to exchanging expertise on matters relating to the situation of women in armed conflict.