



Check against Delivery

**United Nations Security Council
Open Debate on Security Council Resolution 1325
Women, Peace and Security**

*Responding to the Needs of
Victims of Gender-Based Violence*

**Statement by Thoraya Ahmed Obaid
Executive Director of UNFPA
The United Nations Population Fund**

**United Nations, New York
28 October 2004**

Mr. President,
Distinguished Members of the Security Council,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,

Today we are here to speak about the unspeakable—the gender-based and sexual violence that is occurring on a massive scale in conflict and post conflict situations around the world.

From Afghanistan to Liberia, from Colombia to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, from Burundi to Darfur —the list goes on and on—women and girls, and even men and boys, are being subjected to sexual violence, torture and slavery that defy the imagination and bring into sharp focus the cruelty that human beings can inflict on each other.

Study after study shows that the effects of sexual violence linger long after the events and like an open wound continue to fester. The injuries and medical and psychological consequences of such violence—such as fistula, depression, post traumatic stress syndrome, becoming infected with sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS, or pregnant as the result of rape—are generally ignored by authorities or considered as marginal concerns.

But to the millions of women who are affected by sexual violence, these concerns are far from marginal. They cut to the core of their very existence. An effective response to this violence is absolutely central to their lives and futures, and also to the future of their shattered nations.

If women and girls, and communities as a whole, are threatened by gender-based violence, then there is no real chance for peace and security. If the needs of victims of sexual violence are not recognized and addressed, then the opportunity for building a more peaceful and equitable society is wasted. If families and communities are not helped to cope with this issue, then the cycles of violence and revenge will continue.

While sexual and gender-based violence is by no means a new phenomenon, it is a relatively new issue for the United Nations. And the UN system is clearly grappling to devise a coherent and effective response.

It has been four years since the adoption of the historic resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and yet most women in conflict and post conflict situations continue to experience little peace and little security.

This has been made painfully clear to those of us in UNFPA as we strive to promote reproductive health and rights in conflict affected populations. It is truly sad, and terribly angering, to see the tremendous needs. But it is even more shocking to witness the response so far, which remains completely inadequate.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs is finalizing comprehensive multi-sectoral guidelines on sexual and gender-based violence in emergency situations, which will incorporate the variety of guidelines already established—on medical management of sexual violence, psychosocial counseling and reintegration, the collection of evidence and prosecution of perpetrators, and legal reform.

While we have made progress during the past four years—in devising standards, protocols and guidelines—and in putting gender considerations in humanitarian and security policies and putting gender specialists in place, we have not made similar progress on the ground.

The fact that we are discussing this issue in the Security Council today reflects the recognition that greater progress must be made. I thank Ambassador Sir Emyr Jones Parry, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations, in his capacity as President of the Council, for opening this important debate and inviting me to participate.

Security Council resolution 1325 provides a solid political framework for addressing gender-based violence in conflict and post conflict situations. But the challenge we face, quite frankly, is to turn this political framework into political will and concrete action.

It is time to establish systems of accountability within member States and within the United Nations on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325. I support the recommendations brought to this Council by the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security and the recommendations made by the independent experts' assessment in the report, Women, War, Peace.

The absolutely desperate conditions in which millions of victims of sexual violence find themselves, the number and diversity of their needs, present an immediate emergency, and a long-term challenge, which must fully engage all levels of affected societies as well as the Security Council and the international donor community.

There are five serious issues, which, in my opinion, are blocking further progress, and these are:

- 1) The denial, stigma and shame attached to gender-based violence
- 2) The severe shortage of financial and human resources to address this issue
- 3) The continuing impunity, which fosters sexual violence and abuse
- 4) The deteriorating security situations and absence of the rule of law, and
- 5) The widespread proliferation of small arms and the culture of war.

There are several concrete actions that must be taken immediately to respond to the victims of gender-based violence.

Increased political will is needed to ensure that women and girls receive real protection from sexual violence and abuse in their homes and communities, in refugee and IDP camps and in disarmament and demobilization cantonment areas.

It is absolutely essential that police, security, peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel be trained to recognize and respond to gender-based violence. More women are needed in these efforts, including local women. Peace and security and humanitarian response remain male-dominated arenas and we will not make greater progress in addressing the urgent crisis of sexual violence unless more women are put in decision making and negotiating positions. We do not need a few good women sprinkled here and there; we need gender parity so women in positions of power can stop abuses of power.

It is urgent that survivors of sexual violence receive quality reproductive health services to address the horrifying violence they have endured. This is in line with the recommendation in the Secretary-General's report to this Council. It is also in line with the Programme of Action adopted in Cairo 10 years ago at the International Conference on Population and Development. It was there that 179 world leaders urged countries to identify and condemn the systematic practice of rape and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatment of women as a deliberate instrument of war and ethnic cleansing, and to take steps to assure that full assistance is provided to the victims of such abuse for their physical and mental rehabilitation. Today I call on world leaders to transform these words into action.

Just as it is important for refugees and displaced persons to receive immediate food, shelter, water, and basic health and sanitation to stop infectious disease, it is equally important that victims of sexual violence get the services they need.

Together we must ensure implementation of the minimum initial service package for reproductive health services, considered by all to be the basic standard of care in emergency situations.

The package includes training, advocacy and management materials, supplies and medicines to provide safe motherhood and clean delivery; family planning services; post-rape treatment, counseling and emergency contraception; treatment of sexually transmitted infections; HIV prevention, including female and male condoms, blood safety supplies, and post-exposure drugs to prevent HIV infection as a result of rape.

One of the most devastating consequences of sexual violence has been the transmission of HIV/AIDS. In Rwanda, two-thirds of women who were raped during the 1994 genocide were infected with HIV and they are dying slow painful deaths from AIDS. They need anti-retroviral therapy.

HIV infection and AIDS threaten stability and prospects for security—damaging social systems that become overwhelmed, undermining public confidence in the future, resulting in hot spots of vulnerability and economic and social decline.

There has been significant progress in the past few years in working closely with peacekeeping missions to prevent gender-based violence and HIV. Since 2001 in Sierra Leone, UNFPA, UNIFEM, UNAIDS, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the UN Mission, UNAMSIL, have been working together to train peacekeepers so they can protect themselves and the wider community from HIV/AIDS. But much more needs to be done.

Together we must take steps to ensure that incidents of sexual violence are recorded and that evidence is gathered and preserved.

We must increase access to legal services, and psychosocial services that can provide victims with psychological help and social support for their rehabilitation and reintegration.

We must provide effective training programmes for health personnel on how to care for victims of sexual violence, and we must ensure that local organizations and women's groups are actively involved each step of the way.

We must take action to implement programmes aimed at the public and community leaders on the importance of not stigmatizing victims of sexual violence and take action to empower women and girls and enable them to seek help and adequate support.

And greater political will is needed to bring the perpetrators of gender-based violence to justice.

As speakers before me have stressed, this massive and systematic violation of human rights will continue as long as perpetrators remain free and have no fear of paying the consequences for the crimes they have committed. The entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court offers hope that these war crimes and crimes against humanity will be prosecuted and perpetrators will be brought to justice.

All of these measures require immediate and sustained funding so that they constitute a routine and systematic response. I stress this point because most proposals to address gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, both through the consolidated appeals process and transition frameworks, continue to go unfunded by the donor community, and women are paying the price.

I am happy to announce that the Government of Belgium has taken the bold and unprecedented step to fund the first national comprehensive integrated response to sexual violence in a conflict country, in this case the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This new four-year programme, a partnership among Congolese government authorities, NGOs, and multiple UN agencies, includes interventions in all of the areas I have just mentioned ranging from medical response to the rule of law. We hope that it will provide lessons learned and good practices to guide similar programmes in the future.

Mr. President,

Increasing sexual violence in conflict and post conflict situations points to the international community's collective inability to maintain peace and security and to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law. If we do not address the issue of gender-based violence in an effective manner, our failures in the critical areas of security and humanitarian protection will only increase in the years to come. Instead of mainstreaming gender into oblivion, let us focus on ensuring gender justice.

Thank you.