



## UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement by U.S. Ambassador Nancy Soderberg, U.S. Special Representative to the United Nations for Political Affairs, in the Security Council, on the issue of Women and Peace and Security, October 24, 2000

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Mr. President,

The United States warmly welcomes this Open Debate on Women and Peace and Security. We thank Secretary General Annan for his remarks and fully concur with the statement in his report, "equality of rights, opportunities and access to resources between men and women are fundamental requirements" in building a durable peace. I commend President Ben Gurirab and Ambassador Andjaba for their leadership in bringing about this important meeting. In particular I want to extend a warm welcome to Ms. Angela King, the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and Ms. Noaleen Heyzer, the Executive Director of UNIFEM. I hope this body will meet the historic challenges you have put forward today. I also want to extend a warm welcome to our guests in the gallery. Your support and participation is important, it's the first time I've heard applause in this chamber.

Today's meeting must not only make us all more aware of the important role women play in preventing conflict, encouraging reconciliation, and helping to rebuild conflict-ridden societies, but it must also spur us to concrete action. We, in the international community, have failed to make maximum use of the contributions of women in our efforts to promote peace and security throughout the world. As Secretary of State Albright pointed out in a recent speech to a group of businesswomen, "in too many places, women remain an undervalued and underdeveloped human resource."

We applaud the unwavering efforts of the UN and its specialized agencies to confront the problems that affect mostly women. The work of these bodies and the international community's moral and financial support for such efforts have changed the lives of many, both young and old. Working together, we have taken steps to promote equal opportunity, educate girls and women, change unbalanced inheritance and divorce laws, advance political and economic equality, and eradicate traditional practices harmful to women and girls.

Much of our attention has been directed toward protecting women, especially from the devastating effects of armed conflict -- including forced displacement, trafficking of women, torture, rape and other acts of sexual violence, as well as a host of other crimes. For example, the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights focused solely on women as victims of armed

conflict. While the issue of protection of women cannot be ignored, I hope that Security Council action will emphasize the leadership role women can and should play in restoring peace.

Women are an under-utilized positive force for peace. The Fourth World Conference on Women recognized that they must be fully involved in preventing and resolving conflicts. We must actively promote formal mechanisms, which support a consistent female presence at the peace table, in peacekeeping operations and in the peace building efforts to reconstruct institutions vital to lasting stability.

The Secretary-General, by appointing qualified women to visible positions of influence, has set a laudable example for us to follow. Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette, High Commissioners Mary Robinson and Sadako Ogata, UNICEF's Carol Bellamy, and the World Food Program's Catherine Bertini, just to name a few, demonstrate daily that women do make a difference in defusing conflict and promoting equality, peace, and security. The challenge before us is to emulate their achievements in other international and regional organizations, in national governments, and across all levels of society. The United States applauds the appointments of these women, and we want to see more done. In particular, we need more women as Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, as special envoys, and as human rights investigators and monitors. We hope the Secretary-General will strive to appoint more fully qualified women to these important positions. We strongly encourage member states to bring such candidates to his attention and to support the idea of the UN maintaining a roster of qualified women maintained as part of the United Nations Standby Arrangements System.

We need more than influential women at the highest levels of power and prestige. The United Nations must ensure that women's voices are heard wherever the UN assists in the settlement of conflict and in post-conflict peace-building. With all due respect to my colleagues, just look around this room. A good place to start would be for member states to appoint more women as Ambassadors to the UN. Certainly, one woman Permanent Representative, the distinguished Ambassador Patricia Durrant, out of fifteen on the Security Council is at least six or seven too few. And 10 women out of 189 Permanent Representatives is a sad commentary on the state of women in leadership positions of the member states. If we are to heed President Ben Gurirab's challenge we all saw in the video, to make women half of every solution, member states must be able to do better than 5 percent. In all phases of peacekeeping and peace-building missions the presence of women must be visible and consistent. When possible, fact-finding missions should include gender advisors and the terms of reconciliation and reconstruction should draw on the expertise of women's community groups. The immediate aftermath of a conflict provides a unique window of opportunity to re-build, with the equal participation of women, the public security institutions vital to lasting stability. In order to facilitate this, states should be committed to gender balance in their contributions to civilian police and other peacekeeping contingents and to assisting other states in achieving a gender-balanced perspective. In place after place -- from Northern Ireland to Guatemala to South Africa, we see that women are most effective when they are able to organize and be heard. Our First Lady's involvement in Vital Voices around the world has demonstrated that fact time and again. We, as members of the Security Council, cannot be content with token representation of half of the world's population. The Security Council should consider establishing a very specifically mandated, expert panel or

working group to report on mechanisms that will ensure equal representation of women in peacekeeping and peace-building operations.

We also need to prepare our UN peacekeepers for encounters with the entire population in a mission area. This means that peacekeepers – military, civilian police and civil servants – should be trained on gender issues. Those who violate women's most basic rights must be brought to justice. The training should focus on codes of conduct, cultural and societal norms with respect to women, and study of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. At managerial levels, training should include the participation of women in institution building, particularly in rule-of-law areas. The training unit in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations should develop exportable modules that may be used in national and regional programs and all UN training programs should include elements on gender issues.

We encourage states to assist in other meaningful ways, as well. The United States, for example, has provided funding to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to support the Bosnian Women's Initiative, which promotes the reintegration of women into the economy. It emphasizes training, legal assistance, and support for micro-enterprise projects. Likewise, the U.S. has supported the Rwandan Women's Initiative to address refugee women's reintegration. The U.S. Department of State has also provided support to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children that operates in Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Sudan. These programs not only provide services to women in war-torn areas, but they seek also to integrate them into the political and economic lives of their countries.

As we move forward, we should take care that our efforts to further empower women in no way disadvantage men. We should strive for equality, not special treatment. What we really need is a commitment from UN member states, the Secretariat, and all concerned parties to honor the obligations and promises already made to women. Now we should look ahead to concrete initiatives in support of those promises.

Let me again commend President Ben Gurirab and Ambassador Andjaba for calling for this meeting today. I hope it is the beginning of regular discussions in this chamber and that one day there will be equal gender representation around this table and throughout these halls.

Thank you.