

October 29, 2008

Statement by Zalmay Khalilzad, United States Permanent Representative, on Women, Peace and Security, in the Security Council Chamber, October 29, 2008

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I appreciate the opportunity to address the Council on the issue of women, peace, and security. The United States reiterates its commitment to working with others in the UN to prevent the use of sexual violence as a tactic of warfare and to ensure the full participation of women in peace processes and at all decision-making levels of the United Nations. Today I would like to make two points.

First, while we have made progress, it is imperative that the United Nations do more and continue to keep the issue of women, peace, and security in the spotlight. Rape is a crime and sexual violence has a grievous moral and psychological impact -- damaging not just the lives of individuals and families ... but of communities and entire societies. Through greater awareness and action, however, the international community is responding. For example, in recent months, the Congolese government, in conjunction with organizations like the American Bar Association and the United Nations, has instituted programs that have contributed to a decrease in sexual violence and dramatic increases in prosecutions. Even so, women, especially in rural villages, are not safe. Protection and assistance for victims of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict remains an essential part of the solution.

The United Nations has made laudable steps but must do more. It is especially important to eradicate sexual exploitation by peacekeepers. The UN must also do more to factor the issue of women, peace, and security into development portfolios across various sectors, including health, education, democracy and governance, and economic growth. Human trafficking, especially in conflict situations where women and girls are often abducted by militia and turned into slaves or "war wives" must continue to be addressed.

This is why the attention of the Council to this issue is so important. Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 address sexual violence and exploitation in conflict situations more forcefully than ever before. Resolution 1820, in particular, requires the Secretary-General to report on specific situations in which sexual violence has been widely or systematically employed against civilians in such situations. The United States is pleased that the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) -- with its expertise on conflict situations -- will be contributing to the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of this Resolution.

We recommend that DPKO draw upon the inter-agency resources of the UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, so that a wide range of experts and observers in the field can gather the sensitive information necessary to identify and combat sexual violence as an instrument of war.

Second, we must also increase women's participation in all aspects of building peace and security. Security Council Resolution 1820 recognizes and highlights the need for these essential

contributions, but also points out that there is not adequate participation of women in peace negotiations and processes. The United States believes that ensuring the full participation of women in peace processes as well as increased representation of women at all decision-making levels is essential.

Positive steps have been taken. For example, in 2006, female Foreign Ministers and other high-ranking officials from around the world, including U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, formed the Women Leaders' Working Group. The Group works to ensure that the issues of women's political participation, access to justice, economic empowerment, poverty reduction, combating violence against women, and women in conflict and post-conflict situations get high-level international attention. And this has made efforts to promote the appointment of senior women as Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Special Envoys.

Last May, the U.S. launched a public-private partnership called the "One Woman Initiative" that focuses on women's entrepreneurship, political leadership, and the rule of law. The U.S. Government and private donors have provided \$100 million in funding, and the first grants will be awarded this November.

Also this year, the U.S. hosted a Senior Roundtable for Women's Justice, where judges from around the world addressed women's lack of access to justice and discussed best practices to combat violence against women and improve women's legal enfranchisement. The activity is wide-ranging -- from Avon Products which contributed \$1 million to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, to a program that will bring 23 Malawi federal judges to the United States this fall for training on issues related to violence against women.

The U.S. welcomes the conclusion of the Secretary General's report, which states that the deployment of women in the field facilitates engagement with civilians which leads to more access to appropriate services for women and girls and lowers the incidents of sexual violence and abuse. We also applaud efforts by nations such as Jamaica in attaining an equal number of women and men in their UN peacekeeping contingents.

The United States would like to commend Secretary-General Ban for his leadership and commitment to increasing the number of women candidates for UN Special Representative and for Special Envoy positions. At present, 15 of the 37 UN Senior Leadership positions are held by women. The United States hopes that these appointments will continue to increase and that empowerment issues become more prevalent in country-specific reports in the Council.

At the same time however, we recognize that women continue to be underrepresented in peace negotiations. As was mentioned by Ms. Taylor, according to a UNIFEM study which was released last night: only 2.7% of signatories of 15 agreements they reviewed were women. Where information on negotiations was available, there were no female lead negotiators; and women's participation in negotiating delegations averaged only 7%. The United States looks forward to working with Council members and the international community to greatly improve these numbers.

Thank you, Mr. President.