

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security – 29 October 2008
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COSTA RICA

Mr. Weisleder (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to begin by thanking you, Sir, and your delegation for organizing this debate on such an important subject. I also wish to thank Ms. Rachel Mayanja for her briefing on the annual report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2008/622) and also the statements of Ms. Inés Alberdi, Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and Ms. Sarah Taylor, Coordinator of the NGO Working Group on Women and Peace and Security. We also thank Mr. Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing.

Negotiation of peace agreements and postconflict reconstruction are nothing new for women, who are catalysts for national reconciliation. They strengthen development efforts and are fundamental factors in the restoration of stability in societies that have suffered the ravages of war. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was the first recognition by the Security Council of the fundamental role that has been played historically by women in maintaining and restoring international peace and security. However, in most cases, the contributions of women have unfortunately been unofficial, far from the negotiation tables, and their potential to spread peace has been belittled or underestimated on far too many occasions.

The exclusion of women from the processes of conflict resolution and peacebuilding has an excessively high cost that we cannot afford. That exclusion not only weakens the effectiveness of conflict-prevention mechanisms, but also drastically reduces the opportunities for peacebuilding. It is important to remember that in traditional societies — in many cases that is where armed conflicts have taken place or are continuing — the role of women in the family and in society is absolutely pivotal. Lasting peace cannot be built based upon the status quo, which has allowed inequality and the imbalance of power to continue and has, in the majority of cases, been one of the deep-seated causes of conflict. The peace process must identify the specific needs of women and must appropriate the necessary resources to address them. Such a process would then produce enormous results for society. We must transform prejudices and patterns of social discrimination and those laws and customs that are obstacles to the equal participation of women.

As Simone de Beauvoir said, one is not born a woman, but becomes one. But in order to change this, we must give explicit support to the participation of women, in particular in decision-making, so as to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) also represented a change of paradigm by placing women at the heart of the consideration of the issue, not just as victims but as engines for change forging their own destinies and as brave contributors to peace and development in societies suffering from armed conflict or emerging from conflict.

We must expand the role of women in negotiation, mediation, dialogue, constitution drafting, elections, reconstruction and justice. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/622) gives us various examples of success stories around the world, where the effective participation of women has borne fruit. That has been the case in some peacekeeping operations, where, as members of military observers or police forces, women have made it possible to increase security and to reduce incidents of sexual abuse, facilitating the involvement of other women and strengthening access to services. That is part of the purpose of the Secretary-General's report, and it is a balanced report.

However, we still lack sufficient political will and resources to promote the systematic participation of women in United Nations peacekeeping operations. The report of the Secretary-General disturbingly highlights the fact that only 2.2 per cent of military personnel in United Nations peacekeeping operations and 7.6 per cent of civilian police personnel are women. To date, our Organization has only one woman Head of Mission in one peacekeeping operation. It is crucial that we adopt essential measures to avoid gender violence in armed conflicts, in particular the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. Reality as it exists for millions of women should be taken into account. We must offer them equal opportunities and we must identify their specific needs. In order to do that, we must break with the patterns of marginalization in protection and economic recovery and strength of democratic institutions, governance, justice, reform of the security sector and compliance with the rule of law.

Costa Rica considers that incorporation of the gender perspective is an indispensable tool for dealing with the terrible effects of conflict and is helpful too in conflict prevention. Women have the capacity to bring peace to all factions and to every home. For that reason, we should capitalize on their potential and work actively to include them in the processes and strategies for conflict resolution and the political tasks of the post-conflict period, because peace should not only be sustainable but above all, it must be inclusive, allowing everyone to enjoy its dividends on an equal footing.

Costa Rica does not want to idealize or to overburden women by exaggerating their capacities in those functions. However, because of the characteristic qualities of women, we are convinced that policies of gender equality and the inclusion of women constitute very important contributions in our efforts to avoid conflicts and to resolve them when they do occur.