

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Statement by H.E Mr. Vincenzo Scotti, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Italy to the United Nations

First of all, allow me to fully align myself with the statement that will be delivered by Slovenia in its capacity as President of the European Union.

The issues that we are addressing today — women and peace and security — deserve the international community's utmost attention and unequivocal support. I will therefore begin by stressing Italy's commitment to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which provides a comprehensive framework for addressing every aspect of the relationship between women and peace and security. It recognizes a key concept that should guide all of our actions in this field: women cannot be protected unless their participation at the decision-making level in all peace and reconciliation processes is ensured. At the same time, the protection of women from the violence of war is a necessary step towards empowering them to participate in the rebuilding of their societies.

Our success in implementing resolution 1325 (2000) must be judged on the basis of the improvements that we have already secured relating to the status of women. In our opinion, only one conclusion can be drawn: not enough has been done. Hence our conviction that the time has come to identify achievable and specific goals, without losing sight of the general picture.

From this perspective, countering the unspeakable horrors resulting from the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is a clear priority. I am therefore particularly grateful to the Government of the United States of America and to you, Madam President, for having organized today's open debate and for having submitted the draft resolution that will be adopted later and that Italy is honoured to co-sponsor.

The situation before us is appalling: 70 per cent of the casualties in recent conflicts have been civilians or non-combatants — most of them women and children. Women's bodies have been increasingly targeted during conflicts. Evidence shows that in many cases this represents a deliberate method of warfare and, sadly, a particularly devastating one. Rape and sexual violence are used to achieve political and military aims; to dominate, terrify and humiliate opponents; and to uproot communities and ethnic groups, thus contributing to the collapse of entire societies for generations to come.

Concrete information and precise evidence is, unfortunately, hard to come by, since the victims are often unreasonably and unacceptably stigmatized and too traumatized to come forward and denounce the violence to which they have been subjected. Nevertheless, what we do know is truly appalling: millions of women and girls have been raped, gang-raped, sexually tortured and abused, often in particularly atrocious ways.

From that perspective, the link between sexual violence and the maintenance of peace and security becomes evident; it demands immediate action by the international community and is therefore very much the business of the Council. All mandates for United Nations missions should ensure that whenever and wherever the United Nations is in the field — be it in peacekeeping or humanitarian operations — its staff is trained to prevent, recognize and respond to sexual violence. A collection and analysis of existing best practices could be an important exercise, leading, hopefully, to the formulation of a United Nations doctrine that sets training standards for all military and police personnel deployed by the Organization.

The Council's demand in today's draft resolution is clear: all parties to armed conflict must immediately cease all acts of sexual violence and take special measures to protect women and girls. The Council will have to follow up its demands by monitoring the parties' implementation of those obligations. Accountability is a key element. We have to identify the parties that continue to use sexual violence as a tactic of war, and we must build on the example set by resolution 1807 (2008).

We therefore need an efficient system to gather accurate information. We hope that the report requested in the draft resolution will meet this need. We also need to fight impunity for such acts, defined as a crime against humanity and a war crime by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We must devote more time

and resources to strengthening the activities of national and international tribunals, including in post-conflict situations, to building a gender-sensitive transitional justice system and a gender-sensitive security sector.

In this regard, I am very pleased to announce that Italy is in the process of disbursing a specific contribution of €1 million to fund a United Nations Development Fund for Women programme on resolution 1325 (2000) in Liberia, in addition to several other initiatives that it has financed in recent years.

Today's resolution will be a major step forward, much like resolution 1325 (2000) was eight years ago. The Security Council has the moral and legal responsibility to send a clear message to the international community that it is determined to put an end to this scourge; to the perpetrators of crimes against women that they will no longer go unpunished; and to women that they will no longer be the victims of armed conflict, but rather the main agents of life and peace in their societies.