

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1820
Thursday, June 19, 2008

Statement by H.E Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo, Representative of Spain to the United Nations

Spain welcomes the choice of the topic of women and peace and security for this thematic debate during the United States presidency of the Security Council in the month of June.

I should like to begin by saying that this morning we heard some extremely important statements, including those made by the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, the presiding officers of important bodies of the Organization, the United States Secretary of State and, in particular, such individuals as the Ministers from Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as Major General Cammaert, who have very closely experienced this problem in various places, especially Africa.

Spain of course associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

Almost eight years after the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), and in spite of greater awareness of the problem we are addressing today and improvements in prevention mechanisms, fully and effectively protecting women in conflict situations continues to be an unfinished task. Violations of the rights of women and girls in those situations continue to increase, despite the legal framework that the international community has put in place and the growing awareness of the severity of the problem. That awareness was reflected in the General Assembly's recent adoption of its resolution 62/134, on eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict situations, of which Spain was a sponsor.

Responding comprehensively to the use of sexual abuse as a weapon of war continues to pose a challenge for the international community. Along with the ad hoc measures adopted in extreme cases in given peacekeeping operations, it is imperative that the United Nations decisively address the question of how to structure and institutionalize an efficient response by the international community to this very serious problem. Among other things, we need to wage a frontal war against the impunity that, in too many conflict situations, is enjoyed by those responsible for committing crimes against civilians, especially women and girls.

International law has appropriate mechanisms at its disposal. Among them, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court categorizes systematic rape as a war crime and a crime against humanity and, in certain circumstances, even an act of genocide. Universal accession to the Rome Statute would be a crucial step towards combating impunity; as is the implementation of the principle of universal justice by States that have incorporated that principle in their legislation, as Spain has.

With regard to my country, and in the broader framework of the policy of equality that my Government has promoted and strongly defends, in November 2007 Spain adopted a national action plan to implement resolution 1325 (2000) within the context of the objectives of Spain's organic law for effective equality between men and women. In line with resolution 1325 (2000), Spain's action plan reflects the beliefs that peace is inextricably linked to equality between men and women and that women's equal access and full participation in power structures and their complete involvement in efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

In that regard, allow me to briefly refer to some of the measures that the Government of Spain has adopted to respond to the pending challenges. Those measures focus on six basic objectives: promoting the presence of women in peace missions in which Spain participates; mainstreaming the gender perspective in all phases of those missions; specific gender training of personnel participating in missions; full respect for the human rights of women and girls in conflict situations; promoting the principle of equality in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes; and promoting greater participation by civil society groups in this area.

Spain supports the establishment of special units within peacekeeping missions to specifically cater for women and girls who have been victims of sexual violence. Such units should be composed of specialized personnel and, moreover, should serve as coordination centres for the activities both of the United Nations system and of the donor community as a whole.

With regard to cases where crimes against women and girls have been committed by personnel of United Nations peace missions, the Organization has now begun to provide an integrated response to the problem. In that connection, we welcome the General Assembly's recent adoption of its resolution 62/214, the Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel. The Government of Spain firmly supports the zero-tolerance policy on this matter.

Spain is determined to promote new efforts to implement the provisions of resolution 1325 (2000). We are also finalizing an action plan on women and peacebuilding aimed at all actors participating in Spain's system of cooperation for development. The plan, which will not disregard the status of women as specific potential victims of violence, will highlight the particular importance of women as contributors to the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

In a similar vein, the third meeting of African and Spanish women working for a better world — which took place in Niamey last May under the sponsorship of the Governments of Spain and Niger and which included the participation of women leaders and representatives from most African countries, as well as international bodies — adopted a final declaration that, among other things, stated that the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict prevention processes must be recognized and supported, including through the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

The Niamey meeting also called for the establishment of a multi-donor gender and development fund that would be managed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women. Spain will contribute €50 million to that fund.

In conclusion, Spain fully supports the draft resolution before the Council, of which we are a sponsor. We hope that it will be adopted unanimously.