

**UNIFEM**

**A Commitment to the World's Women...**

working for women's empowerment and gender equality

***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

**Statement by**

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**to the**

**Security Council's Open Debate on**

**Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping**

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Mr. Guehenno, Ms. King, Colleagues and Friends

Mr. President, thank you for taking this important initiative to follow up Security Council's Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security.

Two days ago, I returned from Rwanda. As I address you today, Mr. President, I am reminded of the women I met and their achievements against the greatest odds. They won the legal right to their land and inheritance. They adopted orphans and children born of rape. They risked their lives in the pursuit of justice and they are supporting their families while confronting HIV/AIDS. These courageous women are, at the same time, reconciling their past and building their future.

Making Resolution 1325 work means making sure that the challenges facing women like these become a regular item on the political agenda, in thematic debates, and every time a country situation is addressed.

In moving this agenda forward, the Security Council invited the Secretary-General to carry out a study on women, peace and security. To compliment this initiative and to give women from conflict zones a vehicle for expression, I appointed two Independent Experts to carry out a global, field-based assessment on the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building.

It is crucial that women's voices are heard and their work on the ground, valued, recognized and supported. After all, it is they who bear the brunt of conflicts. And decisions should be made with them, not for them.

Together, we hope these two reports will bridge operational and political actions in support of peace and security. This nexus goes to the heart of our debate today. Humanitarian and human rights concerns do not compromise military and political decision-making; they are intrinsic to it. This, Mr. President, is the human security equation.

Over the past year, the Independent Experts, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Elisabeth Rehn, traveled to fourteen conflict areas, the majority on the Council's agenda. The Experts' full findings and recommendations will be launched in October to mark the two-year anniversary of

your landmark resolution. Together with the Secretary-General's report, a comprehensive agenda for action will be proposed.

Mr. President, today's session lays the groundwork for this occasion. In preparation, I wish to share with you eight principal findings and recommendations:

1. Prevention: Information from and about women in conflict situations has not informed preventive actions. We all know how the forced exclusion of Afghan women from public space, and the risks they took to provide schooling and medical care, came to symbolise the crisis in that country. But indicators of this kind are not monitored or even systematically collected.

This is as much a problem of expertise as one of organizational shortcomings. The Experts will recommend ways for this information to be collected, analysed, and made available in a way that is politically meaningful.

2. Protection: Mr. President, the glaring gaps in women's protection must be addressed. The Experts were overwhelmed by the magnitude of violence suffered by women before, during and after conflict. They heard testimony of gang rapes. Wombs punctured by guns. Impunity prevails for these widespread crimes against women in war.

3. HIV/AIDS: Wherever a woman lives with conflict and upheaval, the threat of HIV/AIDS and its effects are multiplied. HIV/AIDS feasts on this deadly alliance. These are precisely the conditions in which peacekeepers can make a difference – in promoting awareness and providing support to local communities.

4. Peace processes: Formal negotiations that exclude half the population from the political process have little hope of popular support. The whole peace process suffers when women are absent. Quotas have brought women into the political process. In the short run, quotas are the only way to ensure women's participation, and therefore a more democratic, representative, and sustainable peace.

5. Peace Operations: The Experts found that a gender perspective is not sufficiently incorporated into peace operations. Rather it is isolated in the form of a single staff person or small unit lacking sufficient seniority and resources.

Women in the local community often have little contact with missions nor believe that their needs are taken into account. The Experts recommend that gender expertise inform all aspects of mission planning and operation.

This must begin with the very concept of operation. They also recommend that peace operations leverage their support for women by drawing more heavily on the strength of operational bodies, such as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNIFEM.

6. Codes of Conduct: The Experts were alarmed at reports of violations committed by peacekeepers, United Nations and other humanitarian personnel. They support the Secretary-General's call for zero tolerance for those who commit such crimes and recommend stronger investigative and disciplinary mechanisms.

7. Regional organizations play an important role in protecting women and supporting their participation in peace-building. The Experts welcome the priority being given to women in the framework of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations. They look to women's peace organizations at the regional level to contribute to these efforts. Many of these peace organizations and networks have been supported by UNIFEM.

8. Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): The beneficiaries of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes must not be limited to male combatants. Female combatants, the wives, widows and other dependents of ex-fighters must be included explicitly. Without gender focused DDR, women and girls may be left with little choice but to exchange sexual favours for food, shelter, safe passage and other needs.

Mr. President, I would like to conclude with a message entrusted to me by the women I met in Rwanda. Many of them have testified against war criminals that still wield power and influence. They have endured the pain of telling, retelling and reliving their story often without privacy and security. More than 60 per cent of these women have HIV/AIDS.

Mr. President, women seeking justice need protection and look to the standards set by the ICC. They ask for witness protection, counseling and security. They ask for legal support. They ask for a separate chamber and female judges to hear cases of women survivors of sexual violence. And they ask for sanctions against tribunal staff that do not respect the rights of witnesses.

The women of Rwanda know that the Security Council can take practical steps to make a difference. These women have survived genocide, and now face continued intimidation, and physical threats. For them, this is a matter of life and death. Immediate action is now needed.

Mr. President, there cannot be justice without accountability. With few exceptions, those responsible for crimes against women have not been punished and women have not been granted redress.

Accountability means being answerable to women for crimes committed against them; it means punishing those responsible and ensuring redress for victims.

But accountability alone will not ensure lasting peace. Gender equality and inclusion are fundamental values on which peace-building must be based.

Women's leadership in creating and sustaining peace at the community level has proven essential for nation building. We, as an international community, must support the women and girls who are rebuilding their lives and who have committed their lives to peace and justice, for which they have waited too long.

I want to leave you with the words of Agnes, a thirteen year-old girl, kidnapped by the Lord Resistance Army in Northern Uganda, speaking at the global video conference on ending violence against women, coordinated by UNIFEM linking 5 sites around the world. She said, *I want to go to school. I want to rebuild my life. How could you help me?*

Thank you.