

**Statement by Molly Phee, Deputy Political Counselor, in the Security Council, October 26, 2006: the roles of women in the consolidation of peace,**

The United States would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your selection of this topic for your presidency's thematic discussion. The debate on resolution 1325 (2000) has become an important annual event precisely because it is considered to embrace such a wide range of significant concerns and issues related to the Security Council's responsibility for international peace and security.

As pointed out by the first four speakers this morning, the United Nations must act - and, indeed, in many instances has acted - to acknowledge and strengthen the role of women in peace processes and in post-conflict peacebuilding. Women can, and should, be involved in both making peace and maintaining security following conflict, not only in the sense of patrolling streets, but also as builders of consensus and leaders of reconciliation in post-conflict settings.

Women continue to take on greater roles as agents of change throughout all our societies. That dynamic is a healthy trend that all nations should support and foster. Yet, all too often, women have been largely excluded from formal efforts to develop and implement fresh solutions to seemingly intractable conflicts and their aftermath. Their involvement in those processes to prevent conflict and stop war is essential, and the United States takes seriously the challenge of bringing women, as equals of men, into the mainstream of decision-making and negotiation.

Allow me to cite some examples in which women's involvement in the peace process has had an immediate and lasting impact. One example comes from Sierra Leone, where the Government included the participation of four women in a team of nine in peace talks that led to the development of the Lomé Peace Agreement of 1999. In Liberia, a group called the Mano River Women's Peace Network won the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights in 2003, due to its involvement and positive influence in both conflict resolution and peacebuilding in that country. The group, comprised of women from Liberia and neighbouring Guinea and Sierra Leone, directly participated in the formal peace talks.

Another African example comes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where horrendous numbers of women and girls were raped, abducted and physically abused as part of that conflict. Women's groups there played a critical role in shining a light on those abhorrent acts and in combating the stigma faced by the victims. Today, those groups continue an active campaign to mobilize the Government into holding accountable those responsible for crimes against women. I would also note that women are playing a vital and important role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's democratic transition.

One last example involves Nepal. Women's groups in that country were not only active in pushing for peace, but were instrumental in securing a guarantee of equal rights for

women and men in the country's new constitution. That achievement is especially significant given the degree to which women were involved in the conflict, both as combatants and as victims.

Despite those successful examples of and by women to increase and strengthen their role in peacemaking, there remains resistance to the notion that women can make a difference. The exclusion of women from important decision-making and political and social leadership roles is a deeply ingrained tradition in many societies. Changes to that counterproductive tradition will require a conscious, deliberate effort by us all.

In the past, women's traditional roles in society have often been used as an excuse for their exclusion from decision-making and leadership, but the unique roles and perspectives of women are essential to both formal and informal peace processes, especially in addressing entrenched cultures of violence. Because women frequently outnumber men after a conflict - such as in the case of the southern Sudan today, where the ratio of women to men is two to one - they will have a particularly critical role to play in the implementation of any peace agreement and in building the institutions that will maintain the peace.

Experience increasingly demonstrates that incorporating the efforts of women peacebuilders builds more effective programmes. Their inclusion will advance their rights and lay the groundwork for a more sustainable peace. Therefore, women have not only the right, but the responsibility to be an integral part of all stages of the peace process and the consolidation of peace.