

Mr. Tangara (Gambia):

The Islamic Republic of the Gambia would like to align itself with the statement made on behalf of the African Union.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate the Russian Federation for being at the helm of the Security Council for the month of October. I commend the President for the able manner in which he has conducted the affairs and proceedings of our meeting and for including the issue of women and peace and security on the agenda of the Security Council. It is an issue to which my delegation attaches great importance. I also thank the Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UN- Women for the very exhaustive briefings they presented. As a country in which women represent 51 per cent of the population, the Islamic Republic of the Gambia welcomes this debate on women and peace and security. Over the years, we have come to recognize the importance of women in peacebuilding and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, yet we have not been able to give women the requisite power or even status to play a role in the achievement of peace and security.

We recognize the gallant efforts of the United Nations as exemplified in many resolutions, especially resolution 1325 (2000), which enjoins us all to involve women in peacekeeping, the prevention of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. Unfortunately, time and circumstances have shown that lack of political will, intolerance leading to conflicts, and archaic laws continue to serve as obstacles to the full participation of women in the quest for peace and security.

The only effective way to facilitate the direct involvement of women in efforts aimed at creating a culture of peace in the world is to ensure that women have access and a voice at the table where policies and programmes are articulated. In almost all cases, women in peacekeeping operations are relegated to secondary roles. Yet there are many roles, especially in the negotiating process, in which women can play an effective role and make effective contributions.

As a start, we should encourage the appointment of more women to key and pivotal positions in peacekeeping operations. We note the positive move in Darfur, where the Commissioner of Police is a woman. In Abidjan, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General is also a woman. There are other such appointments, but more needs to be done.

We cannot speak of peace without taking concrete steps to outlaw violence against women. It is sad, indeed tragic, that women and girls are still subjected to rape and other forms of violence. Women are the soft targets in any conflict, and now we are witnessing the alarming rate at which the rape of women is being used as a weapon of war. This atrocity must stop, and we wish to add our voice in condemning it as a gross violation of human rights.

Rape, with all the pain and indignities it entails, should not only be condemned but also prosecuted. It should be prosecuted as a human rights violation punishable by stiff penalties. Rape in war zones should be made a crime against humanity and prosecuted by all countries. Those who use rape and violence against women should have no place to hide, and we should articulate international laws that will give all countries the right to prosecute the perpetrators of this horrible act if they enter our jurisdictions.

I also wish to underscore the importance of education in our quest to further peace and security. Our experience in the Gambia is that when given opportunities, women

constitute a formidable force capable of transforming a nation. That is why we in the Gambia regard women as agents of change and progress. The world will benefit from the vast knowledge and experience of women if we empower them in the context of the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. As pillars of our societies and natural pacifiers, women, along with men, can be valuable agents that can change the world.

We have made some progress, but much remains to be done. There is a need to work on breaking down the barriers of age-old prejudices against women. Traditional society's entrenched notions about women must be eradicated through education and persuasion. We call on all national Governments and the United Nations to adopt a policy of affirmative action that will bring women into the mainstream of activities. What is at stake is crucial, because the continued exclusion of women from the peace and security processes will render our efforts invalid.