

TO ALL PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES OF UN MEMBER STATES AND UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Dear Ambassador,

The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security looks forward to the Security Council Open Debate on 19 June 2008 on the theme: “Women, Peace and Security: Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict.”

The NGO Working Group advocates for the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and for their protection during conflict. Many gaps and challenges to the full and effective implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 remain, including the lack of prevention and protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations, and the need to end impunity for such acts of violence.

We therefore share the Security Council’s concern raised in its Presidential Statement of October 2007 (PRST/2007/40), that despite its efforts to date, acts such as “gender-based violence, particularly rape, and other forms of sexual abuse... remain pervasive, and in some situations have become systematic, and have reached appalling levels of atrocity.” We also share the view of the Security Council, expressed in several resolutions, that violence against women and girls as a tool of warfare needs to be addressed (S/RES/1509/2003, S/RES/1468/2003, S/RES/1493/2003, S/RES/1590/2005).

In light of this we urge you to actively support our recommendations during the Open Debate and in your discussions with Security Council members, that any new action taken by the Security Council to better protect and promote women’s human rights in conflict-affected situations, should at a minimum:

- Require the Security Council to recognize that sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected situations is relevant to the maintenance of international peace and security and therefore the Security Council should ensure systematic monitoring and analysis of such violence and, where appropriate, take timely action;
- Require that the Secretary-General systematically include comprehensive information on acts of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in all of his reports on conflict-affected situations and to report to the Security Council on ways to improve the level and quality of such reporting;
- Require the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on ways to improve the UN’s response, in particular at the highest levels, including at the Security Council, to stop sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected situations. Such a report should draw on the full capacity and expertise of all experts including the UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, non-governmental organizations and women’s groups at the local and global level. An independent expert could be appointed to lead this study; Require that women’s groups at the local level actively participate in the design and implementation of strategies and programmes to meet their security needs and concerns; and for greater participation of women in peacekeeping and civilian functions in particular to monitor and curb incidents of sexual violence;

- Demand an end to impunity for perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence.

It is particularly important that women, as active agents of change, are empowered by any new Security Council resolution on sexual and gender-based violence and are not reflected as passive victims and mere recipients of assistance. It is also crucial to ensure that sexual violence not be seen as an isolated issue but as integral to the issue of women's full and equal participation at all levels of decision-making on peace and security issues.

We would be glad to discuss these matters further with you or your representative and look forward to your support during the Open Debate on 19 June.

Yours Sincerely,

NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

Amnesty International
Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights
Femmes Africa Solidarite
Global Action to Prevent War
Global Justice Center
Human Rights Watch
International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)
International Alert
International Women's Tribune Center
Women's Action for New Directions
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom