

Statement by Ambassador Asoke Kumar Mukerji, Permanent Representative of India, at the United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Protection challenges and needs faced by women and girls in armed conflicts and post conflict settings on January 30, 2015

Mr. President,

I thank you for giving me the floor. I would like to join others before me in thanking our briefers for this open debate. I would also like to thank the delegation of Chile for having circulated the Concept Note to guide our debate. As a country whose delegate, Smt. Hansa Mehta, introduced the focus on women in the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, India is strongly committed to the rights of women globally.

My delegation speaks on the basis of extensive experience in UN peacekeeping operations over the past six decades. India, as the single largest contributor to these operations, having sent over 180,000 troops in 43 of the 68 peacekeeping operations mandated so far by this Council, is deeply conscious of the significance of the topic of this open debate today. We are committed to a zero tolerance policy on violence against women.

When the first UN peacekeeping operations were mandated by the Council, we contributed our troops to ensure that these operations were successful, and that they would result in keeping the peace. This objective, of keeping the peace, was the best guarantee for protection of civilians, especially women, caught up in armed conflicts.

Mr. President,

Until just a few years ago, our experience was that the traditional mandate of UN peacekeeping, anchored on the three principles of consent of parties to the dispute, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate were sufficient to keep the peace and take care of protection of civilians in the area where UN peacekeepers were deployed. However, the threat faced by civilians in armed conflict situations has undergone a significant change in recent years, especially due to the change in the nature of the armed conflicts. Whereas earlier, our peacekeepers were deployed to keep the peace between states, we are now witnessing a steady increase in the deployment of UN peacekeepers in situations of internal conflicts within member states. It is a matter of concern that most of these situations appear to be open-ended, often due to the breakdown of national governance structures within the country, as well as to the evident inability of the Council to address and nurture sustainable political solutions to such conflict situations. The impact of this instability and violence has been felt by the most vulnerable of the civilian populations, especially women and girls.

Mr. President,

As the Concept Note points out, increased participation of women in redressing such situations could make a significant difference in finding a solution to this problem. The participation of women in all aspects of the prevention and resolution of conflicts is an important policy measure which the Council should encourage while mandating peace operations.

India was the first member state of the United Nations to implement such a policy when we contributed an all female formed police unit (FPU) to the UN peacekeeping operations in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2007. As former US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton told this Council in 2009, "They have set an example that must be repeated in U.N. peacekeeping missions all over the world". The Council should make an assessment on whether this has actually happened since then, or not.

Our experience in Liberia showed that the actual requirements for addressing issues confronting women in armed conflict were related to the concept of peacebuilding, rather than peacekeeping. We believe that the time has come for the Council to disaggregate the complex multidimensional nature of its peacekeeping mandates, and focus on addressing issues confronting women in armed conflict situations through focused peacebuilding activities, so that the transition to a post-conflict society can be sustainable. Such an approach would give greater scope to humanitarian and development actors to take appropriate action against the exploitation and abuse of women caught in situations of armed conflict.

Mr. President,

The Concept Note stresses the importance of women's empowerment in this context. We would underscore the inherent linkage between women's empowerment and development, in order to sustain the peace.

In conclusion, we would like to refer to the recently constituted High Level Panel on Peace Operations by the distinguished Secretary General, who has made a conscious effort to enable the Panel to focus on women's issues. We would recommend that the Council forward the conclusions of this open debate, including the views expressed by member states not members of the Council like us, to the Panel for their consideration.

Thank you.