

27th July 2009

**OPEN LETTER
TO PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES TO THE UN:
RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON
“WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY”**

Dear Ambassador,

We non-governmental organizations, working with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, welcome the UN Security Council's intention to hold an Open Debate on Women Peace and Security on the 6th August 2009. We urge you to make every effort to ensure that this Open Debate results in action by the Council, UN system and Member States that decisively addresses the use of sexual violence against women and girls in conflict-affected situations and ensures more effective protection and assistance for survivors.

In 2000, we and other women's human rights defenders and peace organizations successfully advocated for the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security to better protect and promote women's human rights in conflict situations and their engagement in matters of peace and security. We also advocated for and welcomed the follow-up resolution 1820 adopted last year, to advance efforts to prevent and respond to the use of sexual violence.

These resolutions have successfully resulted in a greater awareness of the specific concerns of women and girls in conflict. An increasing number of authorities at the international and national levels have since demonstrated growing political will to address their obligations highlighted in 1325 and 1820. Tangible, positive change in the lives of most of these women and girls nevertheless remains elusive, particularly regarding their protection from sexual violence in conflict, and their participation in peace talks.

The first report of the Secretary General on SCR 1820 demonstrates a number of challenges facing the international community's efforts to effect that change. There are a number of recommendations in the report, including that concerning the appointment of a high-level official to drive this agenda forward, to which the Council and Member States should give serious consideration, and which reflect the concerns we have previously raised regarding Member States and the UN system responses to sexual violence.

Although the report does not effectively address the Security Council's concerns regarding information collection, or the lack of systematic and coherent response to sexual violence, we look forward to the upcoming Open Debate as an opportunity to address these issues, as well as the integrally related issues of access to assistance, services, and justice and reparations for survivors.

We therefore urge you to expressly support the following recommendations in your statement at the Open Debate and for inclusion in any outcome for specific action negotiated by the Council:

.. Increase the provision of accessible and quality assistance, especially life-saving health services, for survivors of sexual violence. The prevalence of sexual violence goes undetected without such services, and fails to inform necessary UN action, including action by the Security Council.

.. The involvement of civil society in the design, implementation and evaluation of UN system and Member State strategies to address sexual and gender-based violence. This should include regular consultations with survivors, their communities, and women human rights defenders.

.. The immediate appointment of a much needed high-level, highly experienced and respected United Nations official, such as a new Special Representative on Women, Peace and Security, with responsibility across the UN system to reinforce, support and help drive existing UN efforts forward to address the needs and interests of women in conflict-affected situations, and particularly to prevent and respond to the use of sexual violence.

.. Greater and sustained investment in national and international justice mechanisms to ensure sexual violence survivors' safety and dignity throughout the justice processes; and to ensure suspected perpetrators are promptly brought to justice in accordance with international fair trial standards.

.. Promote the attainment of relevant benchmarks in preventing and addressing sexual violence, including, inter alia, the implementation of measures to reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms & light weapons, which facilitate the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war.

.. A follow-up report on pressing issues left unresolved by the current report, including, inter alia, the timely and ethical collection of information, and the systematic and coherent UN response to sexual violence, as discussed in paragraph 56(k) of the current Secretary General's report.

.. The creation of an appropriate Security Council mechanism to consider and act on information of the measures taken, or lack thereof, by parties to armed conflict, to comply with their obligations regarding women, peace and security under international law. The establishment of a mechanism to monitor implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security was earlier recommended by the Secretary-General (2007 report on Women Peace and Security - S/2007/575; 2006 in-depth study on all forms of violence against women A/61/122/Add.1), and has our full support.

In addition to the immediate action to respond to and prevent sexual violence in conflict zones, the General Assembly is urged to establish a new strong UN entity for women, headed by an Under-Secretary-General and with extensive country operations and the necessary funding. The entity must have a mandate that enables the UN system and member states to implement their obligations under Security Council resolutions on Women Peace and Security.

Recalling the historic outpouring of support for 1820, we look forward to next month's Open Debate strongly endorsing concrete and substantive measures for the implementation of resolution 1820. Before the next surge of violence captures the front pages of our daily media, you have a unique opportunity to demonstrate to the world your seriousness and determination to respond to sexual violence, and to end the impunity currently enjoyed by its perpetrators.

Yours sincerely,

SARAH TAYLOR

COORDINATOR, NGO WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY

On behalf of:

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

BOSTON CONSORTIUM ON GENDER, SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

CARE INTERNATIONAL

FÉMMES AFRICA SOLIDARITÉ

GLOBAL ACTION TO PREVENT WAR

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

INTERNATIONAL ACTION NETWORK ON SMALL ARMS

INTERNATIONAL ALERT

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S PROGRAM AT THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S TRIBUNE CENTRE

WOMEN'S REFUGEE COMMISSION

WOMEN'S ACTION FOR NEW DIRECTIONS

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM.