

**Statement of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping on the occasion
of International Women's Day: March 8, 2005**

Today is International Women's Day. This year's commemoration is an important one for the UN family, as we mark the 10th anniversary of the Beijing World Conference on Women. In October 2005, we will also mark the 5th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

In DPKO, International Women's Day provides an opportunity to take stock of progress in strengthening the role of women in all aspects of peacekeeping, as well as to recommit to addressing the persisting challenges that remain for women and girls in countries that have been devastated by prolonged armed conflicts.

I know that many staff are working under very difficult conditions to promote and protect the rights of women and girls in peacekeeping missions around the world and for that, I salute you all and encourage you to continue in these efforts.

All the same, for the majority of women in countries of conflict, the quest to find a voice in peace processes and to attain equality with men remains a distant reality. The participation of women in peace negotiations is the exception rather than the rule, which limits their opportunity to influence and highlight gender-specific issues in all aspects of the post-conflict agenda, including in the economic, political, legal, constitutional and socio-cultural spheres. Our peacekeeping missions have a critical role to play in redressing these gaps in the early post-conflict phase and in laying the foundations for more equal societies.

There is much work to be done. Violence against women is a pervasive threat to women's basic human rights in conflict and post-conflict situations, when the rule of law is weak. In horrifying numbers, women and girls are subjected to rape, forced marriages and other forms of physical and psychological abuses during wartime. In the aftermath of war, economic destitution and organized crime drive many into forced prostitution. Others are vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Such exploitation has shamefully, in some cases, been perpetrated by international members of peacekeeping missions, peacekeepers who have a responsibility to protect the vulnerable. Every effort is being taken to investigate such acts and to put in place the necessary reforms to ensure they do not recur.

In a number of mission areas, DPKO staff are teaming up with UN partners and local women's rights groups to address the scourge of gender-based violence at the national level. Gender units are playing a critical role in training and sensitising

peacekeeping personnel on gender mainstreaming approaches related to their work and helping to build strategies to prevent gender-based violence.

A gender perspective is also being increasingly applied to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes, but we must redouble our efforts to ensure that women associated with fighting forces are recognized as such and are able to access support under DDR programmes.

This year, DPKO has an important role to play to advocate and support women's contributions to shaping the future of their countries, through ongoing planning for elections and constitutional reforms in a number of UN missions. In Afghanistan, Burundi, the DRC, Haiti and Liberia, gender units in missions are working closely with electoral units, governmental partners and women's groups to facilitate meaningful participation of women in forthcoming elections in these countries, both as candidates seeking political office and as voters.

In these and all other aspects of peacekeeping, we must continue to listen to the voices of the host communities, particularly women and girls, whose voices, more often than not, tend to be marginal to decision-making processes.

Today, as we mark International Women's Day, I invite all staff of DPKO to re-commit to promoting, in all aspects of peacekeeping, the principles of equality between women and men.



Jean Marie Guéhenno
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