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October 13, 2008
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Statement by Ambassador T. Vance McMahan, United States Representative to the Economic and Social Council, on agenda item 56 (a,b): Advancement of Women, to the Third Committee of the General Assembly, October 13, 2008.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Although much remains to be done to promote gender equality and end violence against women and girls, important steps have been taken during the past year. Of particular note is the passage by both the General Assembly and the Security Council of resolutions committing the United Nations to take specific and concrete action toward ending the use of sexual violence as an instrument of armed conflict.

UNGA and UNSC Resolutions on Sexual Violence and Exploitation

General Assembly Resolution 62/134 makes clear that rape under any circumstances is an atrocious act and that efforts to eliminate it must be intensified. The resolution calls special attention to the situation of rape in conflict situations and to rape and other sexual violence committed in order to achieve political or military objectives. The resolution contains a strong paragraph on impunity and suggests concrete ways that states and other actors can assist victims. The resolution also called for a report that was intended to help identify situations in which rape is being used to advance political and military objectives. Unfortunately, the Secretary-General's report A/63/216 says little about this egregious practice. Paragraph 12 briefly mentions sexual violence in conflict situations, but should have included specific instances in which rape is used as a tactic of war, so that the international community can consider how to stop them. In addition, while the report contains actions and strategies for protection and prosecution, it does not address prevention measures. On a positive note, the report's descriptions of existing legal systems and protections for victims can serve as examples for member states who have not yet instituted strong laws, protection systems for survivors, and prosecution efforts.

Security Council Resolution 1820 addresses sexual violence and exploitation in conflict situations even more forcefully, and it calls even more clearly for reporting on specific situations in which sexual violence is being used as an instrument of

conflict. The United States is pleased that the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) will be preparing the report on SC Resolution 1820 follow-up. Because of its expertise on conflict situations, DPKO is well-suited to compile the report. We recommend that DPKO draw upon the inter-agency resources of the UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, so that a wide range of experts and observers in the field can gather the sensitive and sometimes elusive information that will be necessary to identify and combat sexual violence as an instrument of conflict.

Women Leaders' Working Group

Mr. Chairman, another accomplishment of which the international community can be proud is the formation in 2006 by several dozen female Foreign Ministers and other high-ranking government officials from around the world, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, of the Women Leaders' Working Group. The Group works to ensure that women's political participation, access to justice, economic empowerment, poverty reduction, combating violence against women in conflict and post-conflict situations are international priorities. It has made efforts to promote the appointment of senior women as Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Special Envoys. The success of these efforts will be an important contribution toward reducing sexual violence against women.

HIV/AIDS

An area of significant U.S. Government concern and action on behalf of women is in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We know that the number of women and girls living with HIV continues to grow rapidly. In 2007 nearly 61% of HIV-positive adults in sub-Saharan Africa were women. It is essential that HIV/AIDS programming be responsive to gender disparities and strive to reduce sexual coercion, violence, and rape.

The United States is responding through partnerships to address HIV/AIDS among women and girls. In July 2008, President Bush signed into law legislation reauthorizing the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for another five years with up to \$48 billion to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The monies will support life-saving antiretroviral treatment; prevent new infections; and provide care including for 5 million orphans and vulnerable children. To meet these goals, PEPFAR will support training of at least 140,000 new health care workers.

More than 700,000 new cases of HIV infections each year in children arise from mother-to-child HIV transmission (MTCT). Through March 2008, PEPFAR has supported prevention services for nearly 12.7 million pregnant women and has prevented almost 200,000 infant HIV infections.

Trafficking in Persons

Another major focus of U.S. efforts to combat violence against women and girls is in the campaign to end the form of modern day slavery known as human trafficking. The U.S. Department of Justice continues to increase its number of anti-trafficking task forces. Over the last seven years, we have prosecuted 156 anti-trafficking cases and secured 342 convictions. During the same period, 1,974 trafficked victims and their family members received a special visa allowing refuge and protection in the United States for trafficking victims from other countries.

U.S. diplomatic engagement and funding has helped to persuade other governments to adopt over 150 acts of new or amended anti-trafficking legislation since 2003.

In the past, UN peacekeeping forces have aggravated the trafficking problem by engaging in acts of sexual exploitation and abuse. The U.S. will continue to encourage the UN, NATO, and OSCE to ensure that their peacekeepers and contractors not engage in trafficking in persons or the exploitation of trafficking victims.

Other Issues

Mr. Chairman, the United States Government has designated "Increasing Gender Equity" and "Reducing Gender-Based Violence and Coercion" as cross-cutting issues within our Foreign Assistance Framework. These issues have been factored into our development portfolios across various sectors, including health, education, democracy and governance, and economic growth. For example, the U.S. Government has worked to raise awareness on the health consequences of female genital mutilation, funded a new program to prevent and treat obstetric fistula in developing countries and provided assistance to women and girls at risk for sexual exploitation and abuse in post-conflict and post-natural disaster situations.

On reform of the UN's gender architecture, the U.S. agrees that the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues (OSAGI), the Division on the Advancement of Women (UN/DAW), UNIFEM, and INSTRAW need to be restructured to

maximize their efficiency and effectiveness. Several of the options recently presented by Deputy Secretary-General Migiro include elements that appear promising, and we stand ready to work with other member states on this exercise.

As this is the Bush Administration's final UN General Assembly, it is fitting to note that the United States has initiated a number of resolutions during the last eight years to support the advancement of women. In addition to the two resolutions already discussed on ending sexual violence in situations of conflict, the U.S. has offered resolutions on affirming basic principles on women's participation and empowerment, reducing demand for victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and creating a strong enabling environment for women entrepreneurs and women in the labor market. And the 2007 Commission on the Status of Women resolution on "Forced Marriage of the Girl Child" encourages continued examination of the linkages between forced and early marriage, poverty, customs and traditional practices, health, education, and economic empowerment

Mr. Chairman, the United Nations and the international community can be proud of these and other efforts to end violence and discrimination against women and girls and to promote their advancement. The United States looks forward to working with other United Nations member states in this Committee and in other multilateral fora to continue and intensify these important efforts.