

UN call to end violence against women in war

The UN Security Council has said that systematic rape and other forms of sexual violence against women during armed conflicts can constitute war crimes and called on the international community for greater efforts to combat the 'silent war'.

'Violence against women has reached unspeakable and pandemic proportions in some societies attempting to recover from conflict,' UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Thursday while addressing a Security Council debate on sexual violence in armed conflict.

Ban called for comprehensive strategies and total involvement by the UN and national governments in responding to the 'silent war against women and girls'.

He told the council that he was committed to 'zero tolerance' and 'zero impunity' for sexual abuse by UN personnel and urged countries that provide troops to follow through with prosecution because the UN has no authority to try the perpetrators.

He pledged to strengthen the world body's code of conduct and hold supervisors accountable for assaults committed by soldiers and staffers.

The UN chief also announced that he would soon appoint an envoy 'tasked entirely with advocacy for ending violence against women.'

Ban said he was bringing together a dozen UN entities in a concerted effort dubbed 'UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict,' involving experts on various issues, including peacekeeping, HIV/AIDS and human rights, to help in stopping rape and other sexual crimes in conflict-ridden countries.

Ban also urged greater involvement of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations and recovery.

'By creating a culture that punishes violence and elevates women to their rightful role, we can lay the foundation for lasting stability, where women are not victims of violence, but agents of peace,' the UN chief said.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who chaired the debate on women, peace and security, said she was happy that the world body acknowledged the the complex problem.

'This world body now acknowledges that sexual violence in conflict zones is indeed a security concern,' she said.

'We affirm that sexual violence profoundly affects not only the health and safety of women, but the economic and social stability of their nations,' she added.

Thursday's debate came after the launch of a global campaign by the UN chief in March to end violence against women, including the practice of sexual violence in armed conflict.

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