

Speech

Steven Vanackere

Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

**Conference "10th anniversary UNSCR 1325:
Ensuring Women's Participation in Peace and Security"**

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(Only the spoken word prevails)

(Thanking Madam HRH Princess Astrid, Baroness Ashton)

Honorable Guests,

Dear participants and delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the distinguished presence of Her Royal Highness, Princess Astrid of Belgium, I am deeply honoured to welcome you to the Brussels Conference marking the 10th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. I would like to express my special appreciation to those people who made the organisation of this conference possible.

Today, all of us make a stand for the full participation of women in processes of peace and security, a cross cutting theme, touching the lives and hearts of many. "We could have peace in one year if women were organized", said the American politician and pacifist Jeannette Rankin.

We are pleased to welcome such a diverse audience for today's meeting. Experts from around the globe - women and men - have travelled to the heart of Europe to share their visions and recommendations with us. By organising this meeting of minds, the EU and Belgium wish to revisit the issue of the undervalued role of women in conflict resolution and position it high on the international agenda.

The conference in Brussels today complements a series of other events organized by Belgium and the EU: an expert seminar taking place in Geneva and focusing on protection, a high level side-event during the ministerial week later this month in New York concentrating on prevention, and an expert seminar at EU

level in the context of Common Security and Defense Policy missions later this year. Hence, we wish to contribute to the global debate on the implementation of resolution 1325.

Ten years of landmark Resolution 1325 and the newfound UN gender entity, UN Women, offers an extraordinary momentum to improve our collective performance and to achieve sustainable peace by systematically including women in peace building and peace keeping processes. During the past decade, the international community has witnessed a gradual awakening in terms of gender mainstreaming. Despite the slow and fragmented progress, today it has become inevitable to discuss gender issues in the peace and security debate.

However, regardless of several successful initiatives and repeated calls for action, there is still a long way to go. Women remain virtually absent at peace negotiations and they continue to be chronically underrepresented in leading governance bodies.

It is a disgrace to humankind that one fifth of the world's women are confronted with sexual violence in their day-to-day lives. One can only be deeply shocked about the war tactics, used as a deterrent, in conflict affected countries, where countless women and children become victims of rape ,sexual intimidation and harassment each year.

The continuing atrocities, as we recently witnessed again in Eastern Congo, are an indelible reminder of the daily reality faced by defenseless people. Today, we are also here to speak up for them.

In this respect, I must add that I value the honest words of under-secretary-general for peace keeping operations, Mr. Atul Khare, who admitted a few days ago that "while the primary responsibility for the protection of the Congolese civilians lies with their government, the UN had also failed." Indeed, also the UN cannot afford to shy away from confronting its shortcomings.

It is clear that anno 2010 some persistent obstacles to the full implementation of Resolution 1325 remain. Today's contributions and panel discussions offer the opportunity to find part of the response to the challenges we are facing.

How can we further enhance the rule of law and address those responsible for committing violations against women's rights? An evident lack of effective accountability systems still widely exists. Moreover, processes of Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration (DDR) in conflict affected areas tend to be slow and demand a profound review of the balance between military and civilian capacities.

In this regard, I can inform you that, since 2008, Belgium is one of the European member states that has developed its National Action Plan 1325. Thorough cooperation between various stakeholders at federal level, which is already a challenge in itself, resulted in an integrated strategy, aiming at the participation and the protection of women through all layers of decision making. In particular, the valuable contributions of the Ministries of Defense, Development Cooperation, Interior, Justice, Equal Opportunities and the Women and Development Commission, together with Foreign Affairs, made the Belgian NAP 1325 happen.

I would like to highlight as well that, the efforts to feminize the Belgian diplomatic corps, have borne fruit: forty percent of the candidates who succeeded in the diplomatic exam in 2009 and started their training, are women. This was unfortunately far from evident in the past, considering the traditional male dominated network of diplomats.

This leads me to another pressing issue, women leadership. I would like to illustrate this with the well-chosen words of Mahnaz Afkhami – the American Iranian Human Rights activist: "As we move into the twenty-first century, women's status in society will become the standard by which we measure our progress toward civility and peace." In spite of the growing market share of women, and despite the grass-roots activism of numerous women's organisations, these indispensable female achievements rarely translate into official recognition at the senior level. We must sadly conclude that there's an overall failure to employ women at high level decision making positions. I believe the EU and its Member States must lead by example and equally improve their performance. I very much look forward to welcome more Belgian female candidates for the new External Action Service.

For all these reasons, I believe it is crucial that people stop seeing Resolution 1325 as simply “a women’s issue”. Men have their equal share of responsibility. Hence, it is key to involve men in leading positions more effectively in the implementation process of Resolution 1325.

Madam, Baroness, Ladies and gentlemen, gender is an integral part in making peace and security. It cannot be singled out and treated as a separate issue, or a last moment “add on”. It is a complex subject crossing many borders, and demanding our undivided attention.

I am confident that what we are about to hear today will inspire us to move beyond the rhetoric and allow us to face the challenge with renewed strength. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said: “It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it.” It goes without saying that Belgium will remain a loyal partner in this honorable struggle.