Situation of women in armed conflicts and their role in the reconstruction and the democratic process in countries after a conflict

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Véronique DE KEYSER (PES, BE) on the situation of women in armed conflicts and their role in the reconstruction and democratic process in post-conflict countries. The report highlighted the positive role that women play in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction, and drew attention to the vulnerability and special needs of women and girls in conflict situations.

The committee said that in times of conflict women civilians, along with children and old people, are victims of all sorts of ill-treatment. In many cases violence against women constitutes not only physical and/or sexual abuse but also a violation of their economic, social and cultural rights. Victims of rape and sexual abuses in wartime are often stigmatised, rejected and mistreated and sometimes, in order to restore honour to the community, even murdered. MEPs emphasised the responsibility of all states to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes including those involving sexual violence against women and girls. They called for zero-tolerance of the sexual exploitation of children, girls and women in armed conflicts and refugee camps, and demanded severe administrative and criminal penalties for humanitarian staff, representatives of international institutions, peacekeeping forces and diplomats guilty of such exploitation.

The report also noted that, despite all the resolutions, appeals and recommendations adopted and made by various international and European institutions, women are still not fully involved in conflict-prevention and conflict resolution, peace-keeping operations and peace-building. It concluded that what was needed was not fresh recommendations but rather the implementation of existing ones, for example UN resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000 on women and peace and security. The committee supported the latter's recommendation that at least 40 % of the people involved in the whole peace process should be women, arguing that "quotas are currently the only way of allowing women to play a significant political decision-making role in national reconstruction processes, and to guarantee their political presence at the negotiating table". And it urged the EU to support measures to significantly increase the number of women at all levels in all European Security and Defence Policy missions.

The report also drew attention to the problem of female suicide bombers, many of whom are recruited after having been raped, and stressed that rape used as a weapon of war affects all women, irrespective of ethnic, religious and ideological differences.

Finally, the committee supported the due implementation of human rights clauses in agreements with third countries and of the principles of international humanitarian law and related international agreements with specific reference to women's rights and needs.