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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 17 July 2006, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. KARIYAWASAM (Sri Lanka)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Hachani (Tunisia), Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka),
Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE
(continued) (A/61/78-E/2006/61, A/61/79-E/2006/67, A/61/85-E/2006/81 and
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Panel discussion on gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies

The PRESIDENT said that the increasing frequency and severity of gender-based violence in humanitarian crises and its enduring impact on individuals and communities stemmed from the intensification of conflicts and natural disasters that made for societal disintegration and the trivialization of human values. While most victims of sexual violence were women and girls, men and boys were also victims. Responsibility for ending gender-based violence was the responsibility of States, which had the obligation to protect civilians within their borders or to allow aid organizations to protect survivors.

Ms. FELLER (Assistant High Commissioner, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that gender-based violence had become such an endemic feature of conflict and its aftermath that it was threatening to reach epidemic proportions. Despite the international community's awareness of the problem, its efforts to set up effective systems to prevent gender violence, adequately protect victims and end impunity for perpetrators had been patchy. To illustrate the extent of the problem, she described how the rape of women and girls by soldiers in Kosovo had been so systematic as to have become as routine as taking a shower or having breakfast.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda had recognized the extent to which sexual violence was an integral part of the process of destruction and had held that rape constituted genocide as long as it was committed with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular group. That having been said, any gender-based violence, regardless of the intent with which it was committed, deserved an unequivocal international response.

Unfortunately, refugee camps offered no guarantee against sexual violence, as attested to by a report she had recently received on sexual and gender-based violence in a camp in East Africa, where women from the Great Lakes region had been forced to prostitute themselves

merely to survive. Moreover, victims often continued to suffer even after the crime, when they were ostracized by family and community, and even punished by their husbands or the authorities, while the perpetrators almost invariably went unpunished. As a result, the women were unable to use medical support services and some even felt driven to abandon their babies. Reports of sexual violence against men and boys were rarer because of shame or fear of stigmatization.

The trivialization of sexual and gender-based violence and a tendency to see it as a private matter could set off a chain of human rights violations in which the survivors, not the perpetrators, were punished. She trusted that ways of bringing the issue squarely into the public domain and ensuring that responsibility for prevention, response and justice was accepted at the highest levels of government would emerge from the panel discussion.

Mr. MICHEL (Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, The Legal Counsel) said that gender-based violence was particularly prevalent during humanitarian emergencies, when civilian populations were especially vulnerable. During conflicts it was used as a deliberate tactic of war to destabilize populations. It was also common in post-conflict and post-disaster situations where government and community structures were disrupted, the institutions of law and order were challenged and poverty was rife.

The role of the United Nations and its Member States was to take effective measures both to ensure accountability for such crimes and to prevent their repetition. He recalled the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, in which the Security Council had specifically addressed the impact of armed conflict on women and made a number of recommendations on ways to prevent gender-based violence during and after conflicts, urging Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.

Gender-based violence had been variously described in general recommendation No. 19 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women as violence directed against a woman because she was a woman; and in the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women as any act that resulted in, or was likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, either in public or in private. More recent

descriptions introduced the idea of harmful acts that were perpetrated against a person's will and that were based on "socially associated" differences between males and females, thus extending the connotation of gender-based violence to include men and boys as victims and not restricting it to sexual violence. Such violence was clearly both physical and psychological and had long-term detrimental consequences for survivors and their communities.

Armed conflicts were currently predominantly intra-State in nature and involved direct violence against civilian populations as a deliberate tactic of war. Rape in particular was the most widespread type of gender-based violence and was increasingly used as a systematic weapon of war for the purposes of intimidation and humiliation, political terror and ethnic cleansing. Such cruelty was compounded by its social effects on victims and their communities, its aim often being to destroy entire communities.

The applicable law during both international and domestic armed conflicts was international humanitarian law and human rights law. International humanitarian law established the fundamental principle that civilians could not be attacked, and made specific provision for women and girls. In order to enforce the many laws criminalizing gender-based violence, Member States must ensure that their national systems had the capacity to enforce them effectively. Prevention was as important as enforcement, and refugee camps and the like should be designed with the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls in mind.

Although ending gender-based violence was primarily the responsibility of States, the international community had a role to play in raising awareness of gender-based crimes and tackling the impunity traditionally enjoyed by perpetrators of them. Little attention had been paid to such crimes until the mass rapes and sexual violence in the early 1990s in the former Yugoslavia and later in Rwanda became public knowledge thanks to the international criminal tribunals for each of those countries, whose statutes specifically included rape as a possible component of crimes against humanity.

In Rwanda, the *Akayesu* case marked the first time an international court had punished sexual violence in a civil war and had found rape to be an act of genocide, while the *Kunarac, Kovac and Vukovic* case in the former Yugoslavia had been the first time one had indicted individuals solely for crimes of sexual violence against women. The Special Court for

Sierra Leone had gone further, by explicitly expanding the categories of gender-based violence falling within “crimes against humanity” to cover not just rape but also sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and other sexual crimes. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court had broken new ground in describing specific forms of sexual violence as constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity. That Statute also reflected a growing recognition of the need to ensure that victims felt able to report such crimes, that the crimes were properly investigated and that the judicial authorities had the expertise to deal with them. It specifically provided for the participation of women as judges and prosecutors, for the employment of experts in investigating sexual and gender violence and for special protective measures for victims and witnesses.

In order to fight impunity effectively, Governments were encouraged to carry out periodic reviews of their laws and criminal justice mechanisms in order to ensure that they prevented discrimination against women. Governments had a responsibility to protect and support victims and to provide proper training for the relevant public officials. It should be noted that the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court could be triggered only when the State with jurisdiction over a matter was unwilling or genuinely unable to investigate or prosecute it.

The legal framework applicable to humanitarian emergencies caused by natural disasters and in periods following armed conflict was provided by human rights law. The challenges facing the international community in such emergencies were complex; but there, too, prime responsibility for the response to them lay with national Governments. Although certain provisions of human rights law were derogable in emergencies, fundamental protections were not, as clearly established in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Moreover measures derogating from the Covenant must not involve discrimination on any grounds.

A host of international and regional instruments for preventing and punishing trafficking in women and children for the purposes of prostitution required States parties to take effective measures to stop the trafficking and to promote the physical and psychological recovery of the victims and their reintegration into their communities. Legislation was extremely important as it provided the means both to address gender-based violence and to promote the view that such crimes were a matter of public concern, rather than a purely private matter.

Ms. NGENDA HAYO (Minister of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender, Burundi) said that Burundi was overcoming a serious crisis that had wreaked havoc, destroying the country's foremost values, seriously undermining the social, economic and cultural references that had been the pride of its people, and unleashing senseless and unspeakable acts. At the height of the crisis, rape had been used as a weapon of war, and had been committed in a host of circumstances, with gruesome acts committed before, during and after the sexual violence. The number of victims had risen by the day, as if in a competition. Unwanted pregnancies had been legion, and there had been malicious HIV/AIDS transmission, with a sad litany of results, including broken homes, street children and children left as heads of households. Sexual violence had been perpetrated by combatants on both sides of the civil war and by United Nations peacekeepers.

For the victims of sexual violence, there were now rehabilitation programmes and services to combat the effects of HIV/AIDS. Legal action had been taken to prosecute the perpetrators of sexual violence and to secure compensation for their victims. During the conflict, with the spread of HIV/AIDS, many women had been widowed. At a time when they most needed support, they had thus become particularly vulnerable to discrimination in employment and to social ostracism. For example, one woman had been violently expelled from her home by family members; another, whose three- and four-year-old daughters had been raped, had been attacked by her in-laws and institutionalized. Many married women had little education and were consigned to menial labour, and forced to live off the crumbs that their husbands gave them.

A large number of civil society organizations had been set up to address the problem of sexual violence, and were operating with coordination from the Ministry of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender. The Government was committed to prosecuting all perpetrators of sexual violence so as to combat impunity. It denounced any use of rape or inhuman or degrading treatment as a weapon of war, and would adopt legislation to fill in the legal voids and combat any gender-based discrimination or violence. The Head of State had demonstrated the political will to protect children, widows, HIV-positive women and women without children.

A film showing victims of sexual violence, a rehabilitation centre and interviews with specialists and the authorities was projected.

Ms. NGENDA HAYO (Minister of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender, Burundi) said that the film clearly demonstrated the lawlessness that reigned in Burundi and depicted the personal tragedies resulting from sexual violence. It was noteworthy that the government officials in the film were all women. In recent years women had come to occupy a large number of high-level posts in the executive and in the legislature, which helped to raise awareness of, and to increase the Government's sensitivity to, women's problems, including sexual violence. One of the most difficult challenges currently facing the Government was inequality in the legal status of men and women, in particular discrimination in matters of inheritance and succession, which left many widows landless and without resources, thus exacerbating their vulnerability.

The Government had begun to deal with sexual violence, but it was hampered in its efforts by a serious lack of resources for data collection, investigation and prosecution and a daunting array of needs in other areas. Those constraints were compounded by the urgent need to change local traditions by carrying out awareness campaigns. Among many in the police force, rape was still not considered to be a serious crime. For the victims, speaking about sexual violence had been a taboo in Burundi, and despite some openness prompted by the sheer extent of the problem, it remained problematic. The proportion of cases reported probably remained quite low.

While expressing gratitude to Médecins sans frontières Belgium for its support in establishing the Seruka centre for victims of sexual violence, she pointed out that such establishments were akin to hospitals; they treated victims as if they were patients, without addressing the crime itself. If the international community recognized sexual violence as a crime, then such centres should not have to exist in the first place. She therefore called for international support in addressing the root causes of sexual violence.

Ms. NANCHEN (Member of the Committee, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that because the international community had only recently begun to acknowledge the devastating consequences of sexual violence on individuals, families and communities, it had little experience of dealing with the problem. Sexual violence was the only crime for which the reaction of most communities was to stigmatize the victim rather than to prosecute the perpetrator, which meant that victims who reported it ran additional risks. Because

it was related to subjects that were difficult to talk about or were taboo, it was a particularly difficult problem to address, as the humanitarian system generally required quantitative data to identify a problem before taking appropriate action. Yet when services were made available, they drew the victims out of the shadows and confirmed the extent and the consequences of such crimes. Because of the lack of reliable information on sexual violence, any humanitarian agency must assume that wherever there was armed conflict or mass population movements it would exist to some extent, even if it went unseen.

For its part, ICRC approached crimes of sexual violence from the perspective of international humanitarian law. It was aware that women were particularly vulnerable to marginalization, poverty and discrimination even in the absence of a conflict. While it was not for ICRC to criticize or to try to change the respective roles of men and women, it was sometimes impossible to distinguish between sexual violence that was conflict-related and that which was not. To prevent violations of international humanitarian law, ICRC carried out targeted communications programmes, made representations to the parties involved and provided practical assistance. Specifically, for the victims of sexual violence, it provided medical assistance within 72 hours of a rape, gave psychological counselling and support, helped with reintegration into the community, offered financial assistance and provided protection activities, for example by making representations to the authorities.

While ICRC brought some relief, it could be no substitute for political will on the part of States and armed groups to ensure compliance with existing laws. The primary role of ICRC was to remind belligerent parties that international humanitarian law was binding, and not merely a noble aspiration.

Ms. BRUTHUS (President, Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia) welcomed international efforts to address the problem of gender inequality and thereby protect the rights of women and children. Gender equality must strike a balance between, on the one hand, scientific knowledge and political consciousness, which were vital to economic issues, and, on the other, morality, which was important for social justice and gender equality. Moral values were based on principles that unified people and were largely reflected in international instruments. International efforts to promote gender equality had provided the basis for efforts in Liberia to challenge laws that discriminated against women. It was important to define rule of law in each

country with reference to its specific characteristics and bearing in mind the need to provide legal support to victims who were trying to assert their rights in the face of tradition and custom. In Liberia, the arrival of former American slaves in the nineteenth century, and their relationship with the many existing tribal groups, had created a highly complex political, social and economic situation. In tribal society, where polygamy was common, women were wholly subordinate to men, and yet some former slave women had played a leading role in the fight for independence.

Gender-based violence included sexual, physical, emotional, psychological and socio-economic violence as well as harmful traditional practices. Although there were no reliable data on the extent of that phenomenon in Liberia, the degree of gender inequality was quite evident: more boys than girls attended school; 60 per cent of the 86 per cent of the population that was illiterate were women; and 10 per cent of women had not even attended elementary school. According to a World Health Organization (WHO) study undertaken in six regions of the country in September 2005, 90.8 per cent of the women and girl respondents had been subjected to one or more violent acts following the conflict, 82.8 per cent reported having been detained against their will and 80.1 per cent had been threatened with a weapon. Furthermore, 73.8 per cent said force or the threat of force had been used to compel them to perform sexual acts, 75 per cent had been raped and 70.1 per cent had been gang-raped. The victims included babies as young as 18 months and women as old as 65.

The extent of the problem had made it urgent to review legislation and adapt it to the current reality. Her association had embarked on a massive public awareness campaign on the need to break the silence surrounding gender-based violence, stressing that gender-based violence was a crime for which legal redress could be obtained through the courts.

A new rape law had taken effect in Liberia on 17 January 2006, one day after the inauguration of the country's, and Africa's, first female President. The President and the Government were unconditionally committed to enforcing the new law, which expanded the definition of rape to include penetration with any foreign object and introduced stiffer penalties for rape, gang rape and the rape of minors under the age of 18. However, despite the passage of the new law, there had been a reported increase in the crime of rape. The implementation of the new law had been affected by the weakness of the criminal justice system, a shortage of trained judges and police officers, threats against victims and the power of tradition, whereby chiefs and

elders took responsibility for judging cases of rape. She therefore stressed the need to continue efforts to promote a culture of equality and respect for victims. Her association was also recommending the establishment of a special fast-track court to deal with cases of rape; currently only 4 of the 16 existing courts dealt with criminal matters, which caused significant delays.

She made a number of recommendations for a post-conflict society. There should be a clear link between humanitarian assistance and development in order to facilitate a smooth reintegration process. More and better vocational training should be provided for young ex-combatants. A robust awareness campaign on sexual and gender-based violence must be undertaken on a multisectoral basis. Existing legislation must be reviewed with a view to adapting it to current realities, including the need to highlight gender-based violence and gender equality. And young people must be given a modern education which stressed respect for family values, human dignity and morality. In Liberia, the historical reality of widespread sexual and gender-based violence should be carefully analysed with a view to developing solutions for the future.

Mr. ZOUMANIGUI (Guinea) stressed the importance of addressing the issue of gender-based violence in humanitarian emergency situations caused by natural disasters as well as those caused by armed conflict. He welcomed the efforts undertaken by the United Nations system, in particular in Africa, to deal with post-conflict emergencies, but said that less attention had been paid to gender-based violence in emergency situations following a natural disaster. In both types of emergency, vulnerable groups such as women and children were disproportionately affected and their rights were systematically violated. The United Nations, led by the Economic and Social Council and in consultation with the appropriate agencies and bodies, should undertake a more in-depth study of the problem of gender-based violence following natural disasters.

Mr. EKANZA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) deplored the violence against women perpetrated by armed groups, government forces and international troops alike. Violations of basic human rights, such as rape, kidnapping and the forced enlistment of boys in armed groups, were common in situations of armed conflict, and sexual violence in such

situations contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The international community had an obligation to protect families, women and children and to ensure that the perpetrators of sexual crimes were punished.

In June 2006, his Government had adopted a new law on sexual violence, which marked a significant step forward. He called on the international community to ensure that the relevant international instruments were fully applied in order to ensure that perpetrators were prosecuted and victims provided with compensation. Efforts must likewise be undertaken to prevent sexual violence from occurring in the first place. Lastly, he thanked all those individuals and organizations that had sought to meet the needs of the victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said the level of violence against women in emergency situations was proportional to the status of women in the society in question. The breakdown of order and discipline following a disaster aggravated the fundamental socio-economic weakness of women. If women were empowered by a society during normal times, their vulnerability during conflict situations was reduced correspondingly. When sexual violence occurred, punitive measures were of course necessary, but prevention was better than cure. In that connection, he stressed the importance of public education as a means of changing mindsets.

Gender justice and equity had over time become ingrained in Bangladeshi culture, as evidenced by the fact that for many years women had played a key role in politics and government. Programmes existed to provide women with microcredit opportunities and to improve their non-formal education. Women were very active in Bangladesh's vibrant civil society and both rural and urban women had been empowered, and indeed were often the principal breadwinners in their families. He cited the example of the famous "telephone ladies", the women entrepreneurs in more than 60,000 villages who had bought cell phones and made a business of renting those phones out to other villagers.

Ms. FINSKAS (Observer for Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that gender-based violence was widespread and not limited to emergency situations; urgent measures must be taken to eliminate it, support survivors and report, investigate and prosecute

all such incidents, which affected mostly women, especially displaced women and girls. Although gender-based violence could also affect men and young boys, little information was available in that regard.

Gender-based violence had grave consequences for the victim, families and communities. Sexual violence in conflict situations was a violation of fundamental human rights, a global health problem and a development issue. More attention must be paid to women's specific health needs at all times, especially during and after conflicts. In conflict situations, women's reproductive health was severely compromised by the breakdown of public health services and decreased access to birth control and maternal health care. Women and girls were disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS infection during and after conflicts and urgent measures must therefore be taken to develop effective strategies for prevention and care for affected women and girls. Prevention measures must be reinforced with a view to ensuring a well-coordinated multisectoral response.

Extreme situations, such as conflict and disaster, increased the risk of trafficking in women and girls; in that connection, humanitarian agencies should pay special attention to groups in society that were already marginalized, such as women, children and ethnic minorities. The specific situation of girls associated with armed forces must be adequately addressed in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. She therefore welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) on children in armed conflict. In that context, she said that all actors should pay more attention to the specific needs of girls in situations of armed conflict, stressed the need for effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and underscored the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all humanitarian operations and reconstruction programmes, as well as into the work of the new Peacebuilding Commission.

The international community must address with greater vigour the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war against the civilian population. The European Union welcomed Security Council resolution 1674 (2006), which condemned in the strongest terms all sexual and other violence against civilians, particularly women and children, in situations of armed conflict. She stressed that it was the responsibility of all States to prosecute those responsible for sexual

and other forms of violence, including through full cooperation with the International Criminal Court. Victims must likewise be protected in order to avoid continuation of the violence against them or revenge by perpetrators.

The European Union advocated a policy of zero tolerance for all acts of sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and children by personnel involved in United Nations operations. United Nations personnel must demonstrate exemplary standards of behaviour and every humanitarian worker must sign the code of conduct of his or her organization.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict could only be achieved by strengthening the role of women as constructive actors in developing and implementing appropriate responses; more equitable participation of women at all decision-making levels should therefore be promoted. Women and children should be made aware of their rights and they should have safe access to education. It was important that every woman and child be registered as a means of contributing to their protection. Men should also be fully involved in protecting the rights of women and children.

The European Union welcomed the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's guidelines for dealing with gender-based violence in humanitarian settings, which should be disseminated widely and implemented effectively; humanitarian actors should develop standards of behaviour based on those guidelines. The European Union also supported the guiding principles on internal displacement, which, inter alia, expressly provided protection for women. All organizations must mainstream gender and age issues in their activities and in their preparedness and contingency plans. One concrete step towards improving the situation of women and children in the field would be to increase the proportion of female staff in organizations at the field level, especially in the posts of doctors, nurses and protection officers.

Mr. MILLER (United States of America) said that the presentations had highlighted the need for laws aimed at combating gender-based violence to proceed from the history, culture or religion of the country concerned. However, a change in the law was not sufficient if it was not accompanied by changes in the sphere of culture or societal understanding. The deep-seated nature of the problem was illustrated by the violence of practices such as female circumcision. The international community should promote cultures

that valued and empowered women and challenge those that did not. It should not become mired in the cultural relativism that conceived every culture, every moral code, to be of equal worth. The gender issue was essentially one of power, and in situations of crisis the rule of law and societal inhibitions tended to break down. How to empower women in situations where the only power was often the power that came from the barrel of a gun required very careful thought. The first priority, as the representative of the European Union had said, was to ensure zero tolerance of gender-based violence among United Nations peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. Potential saviours could not be permitted to turn into actual abusers.

Ms. BRUTHUS (President, Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia) said that cultures and traditions tended to hamper the implementation of the law in Liberia. A traditional setting could be used to pass off terrible crimes, such as infant rape, as cultural acts and make it very difficult to prosecute them. In reforming the legal systems in countries where such practices existed, it was essential to do away at the same time with customs to which even educated people, including judges, could remain attached. Only then would children be protected and the cause of women advanced in countries where tradition frustrated the rule of law.

Ms. NGENDA HAYO (Minister of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender, Burundi) said that there was a tendency in her country, and in Africa generally, for artificial changes in women's hair colour or style of dress to be found acceptable but for essential changes in the legal status of women to be rejected in the name of tradition. Many donor countries had required recipient countries, including her own, to establish democratic regimes. Perhaps the United Nations and donor countries should similarly make assistance to developing countries conditional on the empowerment of women and respect for their rights.

Mr. MICHEL (Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, The Legal Counsel) said that recognition of the responsibility to protect women's rights and to end impunity for the perpetrators of gender-based violence marked a new stage in the advance towards gender equity. What was now required was to discover new and more effective ways of translating those values into practice. Respecting and ensuring respect for women's rights was not simply an objective but an obligation under international humanitarian and human rights law. There was a need to focus more on the situation of victims and on preventing them from becoming victims in the

first place, which would require changes in the mechanisms of criminal law and international criminal law. States would in future have to accept binding obligations concerning the prosecution and punishment of military personnel or civilians committing crimes in the framework of peacekeeping operations. In response to the comment by the representative of the United States of America that a change in the law was inadequate to address the problem of gender-based violence, he said there was no incompatibility between law and effective action: the real problem was the effective enforcement of the law. The idea that natural catastrophes gave rise to specific forms of gender-based violence was one that merited further discussion.

Mr. MÉRORÈS (Haiti), noting that the prime responsibility for ensuring respect for women's rights rested with the Government concerned, asked whether in a country like Burundi, where women had made significant advances in the political sphere, the Government had taken any measures to increase the proportion of women in the police and the judiciary, with a view to ensuring that laws on gender equity were applied and crimes against women punished.

Ms. NGENDAHAYO (Minister of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender, Burundi) said that the adoption of laws on women's rights posed no problem in Burundi, where women were well represented in the National Assembly and in the Government in conformity with a provision in the constitution. However, the police were not covered by that provision, and one senior woman police officer had been dismissed while investigating the sexual abuse of young girls by United Nations peacekeepers. The police were currently receiving training, provided in association with the United Nations Operation in Burundi, on human rights and gender issues. Burundi also had women governors and administrators who helped to promote Government policy at the local level. The aim of the Government was that gender equality should ultimately become the goal of society as a whole.

Ms. ZOLOTOVA (Russian Federation) said that the effectiveness of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's guidelines for dealing with gender-based violence in humanitarian settings stemmed from the involvement of all countries at every stage in their preparation. The guidelines covered all types of crimes and recognized that different States might define gender-based violence in different ways. A system-wide strategy that did not take such differences into account would not be legally binding in her own country, where the

concept of gender-based violence did not exist in law. There was a need for more normative work at the international level, which should avoid prescribing parallel systems for conflict and natural disaster situations.

Ms. GOLDBERG (Canada) said that the presentations had demonstrated the need for comprehensive action to prevent gender-based violence and end impunity for its perpetrators. She agreed with the representative of Bangladesh that gender-based violence was the result of, and was indeed exacerbated by, situations of gender inequality. The United Nations system's collective efforts should be focused on: prevention, including the adoption of national legislation, engaging men and empowering women; investigation, prosecution and access to justice; the protection of victims and access to appropriate services; and monitoring and data collection and analysis. She welcomed the greater focus in recent years on gender-based violence in the context of humanitarian operations and believed that attention should also be paid to the violence that was common in the aftermath of natural disasters. Her Government had made adherence to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines for dealing with gender-based violence in humanitarian settings a requirement for securing humanitarian funding; she would be interested to learn how United Nations agencies were applying those guidelines.

Mr. AGAB ASHI (Observer for Sudan) said that the Sudanese Government of National Unity was making great efforts to end violence against women in Darfur. They included: raising awareness among the regular armed forces, religious personalities and the media that violence against women was a crime punishable by law; reinforcing the right of victims to medical and psychological care and to a legal remedy; conducting training courses for the police on human rights, with particular reference to women; facilitating the identification of members of the police force; increasing the percentage of female police officers to 30 per cent; establishing joint units of the police and civilians to report on gender-based violence; and providing protection and guaranteeing confidentiality to the victims and witnesses of violence against women. The role of the international community should not be limited to punishing, or threatening to punish, States suffering from armed conflicts, in which some abuses of human rights inevitably occurred. The United Nations and its specialized agencies should help States to overcome such conflicts and to offer equality and protection to their citizens.

Ms. LEIGH DAVIES (Australia) said that the key to addressing gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies was to publicize best practice and focus on action that complemented the existing legal frameworks. Gender-based violence required a multisectoral and coordinated response based on a wide range of international expertise, including that of non-United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. Various guidelines, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's guidelines for dealing with gender-based violence, already existed, and should be promoted.

Mr. AMIN MANSOUR (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, in the case of natural disasters, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other international agencies should be equipped to provide shelters for groups vulnerable to gender-based violence. International humanitarian organizations should take account of the need for doctors and psychologists when dispatching teams on humanitarian operations. In post-conflict situations, peacekeepers could similarly make arrangements to protect vulnerable groups, alongside the humanitarian teams engaged in carrying out their own missions in the field.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.