CROATIA

PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK

Statement

by

Mr. Danijel Medan

Deputy Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Croatia
to the United Nations

at the

Third Committee of the
68th Session of the UN General Assembly,
Agenda item 28: Advancement of Women

New York, 11 October 2013
Mr Chairman,

Today we have the opportunity to discuss and act together to accelerate progress towards securing gender equality and elimination of all forms of gender-based violence. A cornerstone of our approach should be based on the human rights protection and gender mainstreaming perspective, bearing in mind that the empowerment of women is imperative for the full achievement of human rights, as well as for overall economic and political development and progress. However, it is of utmost importance to continue improving a record at home in order to gain legitimacy for addressing the issue globally.

The human rights of women and girls are one of the priorities of the Croatian internal and external policy. Croatian Government works continuously on improving the record on gender equality and to create an environment devoid of gender-based violence. Through permanent adjustment of the legislative and institutional framework, primarily through the Gender Equality Act and the National Policy on Gender Equality for the period between 2011 and 2015, there are already specific and targeted measures in place to combat gender discrimination and raise public awareness of gender equality, including the measures for strengthening the role of women in politics and business.

Besides strengthening national laws and cooperation with the civil society, Croatia has signed or ratified relevant international instruments, and has been upholding relevant international initiatives. On the international level, Croatia is dedicated to the promotion of the global empowerment of women and their basic human rights, particularly in post-conflict and transition states, through targeted political and diplomatic activities and cooperation with relevant international and regional organizations and initiatives, and through the policy of development cooperation focused on education, health and small businesses for women.

Croatia is fully committed to the effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women and strongly supports the work of the CEDAW Committee and its efforts to advance and ensure the implementation of the Convention. Likewise, Croatia strongly supports the Commission on the Status of Women as the principal political forum for exchange of good practices and setting the recommendations for the way forward with regards to the advancement of women.

We also highly value the work of the UN Women which become a dynamic and strong integrative body in promoting gender perspective in all relevant UN activities, and powerful driving force in advancing gender equality worldwide. We commend the devoted work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Mrs Rashida Manjoo, based on human rights approach and a holistic multi-dimensional manner. Croatia hosted the official country mission of Mrs Manjoo in November 2012.

Furthermore, Croatia is fully committed to fulfilling the objectives set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action related to the woman’s full participation in all spheres of societies, including participation in the decision making process and access to power. This is also fundamental for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, which in our view cannot be fulfilled without confronting the gender inequality.
For these reasons, Croatia has also joined the US lead *Equal Futures Partnership* international initiative, and has been implementing its *National Action Plan for Equal Futures* to promote women's political participation, strengthen the social and economic position of rural women, advance female businesses and women in the labor market, and support international efforts to empower women.

Mr Chairman,

Women represent fifty per cent of our societies, and just as much of the talent and wisdom potential, which, if not used, is a great loss for entire society. As the World Bank puts it – gender equality is smart economics: where women prosper the societies prosper too.

However, substantial changes cannot be achieved solely through the amendments and the adoption of relevant laws, policies and institutional frameworks. In our view, stronger efforts are needed to raise public awareness of the human rights of women and girls, and of unacceptability of justification of gender-based violence by tradition, culture or so-called honour. Public awareness is vital to modifying social and cultural norms which perpetuate harmful practices.

One of the most important tools in backing up our advocacy efforts is education of both women and men, on gender equality and unacceptability of any form of gender-based violence. The right of women and girls to education is essential for the development and stability of every society, particularly war-affected and post-conflict societies. In that regard, we are proud to have been appointed by the UN Secretary-General as a champion state of the UN Secretary-General’s Global Initiative on Education - *Education First*. Croatia has also focused its development cooperation efforts on education and economic empowerment of Afghan women and girls through school-building projects and small entrepreneurship projects.

Despite all efforts, violence against women and girls still poses serious threats anywhere in the world and has no borders or nationality. It occurs in all spheres of life and goes to often under-reported and under-punished. In this regard, the recent adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty with a binding criterion on gender based violence would also contribute in preventing the potential negative impact of international arms transfers on women and their rights. Croatia has signed the Treaty in June this year, along with the majority of the EU member states, ratification process is underway, and we stand ready to promote Treaty’s universalization and its effective implementation.

Mr Chairman,

Particularly vulnerable are women and girls war victims of sexual violence, and special attention needs to be put on the protection of their human rights. Impunity for such acts of violence is still prevalent, and the prosecution rate very low. They need to be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators need to be brought to account. Therefore, Croatia welcome the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflicts, Ms Zainab Bangura and strongly supports her work aimed at ending impunity for sexual violence in conflict.
As a member of the group of global champions of the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, Croatia will spare no efforts to take a more prominent role in preventing and combating sexual violence in war and conflicts.

Based on our own tragic experiences of the aggression to which Croatia was exposed at the beginning of the 1990’s – during which rape was used as a method of intimidation and terror, we are convinced that solely by embracing the comprehensive approach we could adequately address the issue of sexual violence in conflicts.

The Croatian Government is currently engaged in designing a new comprehensive legislation to award the status of "civilian victim of war" to survivors of sexual violence from the war; providing psychosocial support and other assistance to survivors; assisting law enforcement in the prosecution of cases of wartime rape; and encouraging victims who remain silent to come forward for justice, recognition, and compensation.

In our view, the historic resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security has raised the much needed attention to the question of women’s empowerment, their role as peace builders and their fragile position as victims of war. The commitments set forth by the resolution are commendable, but translating words into action is the only way of solving the remaining issues. Through the implementation of its National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325, Croatia has been strengthening national measures, particularly educational ones, to bring into focus a specific role of women in peace and security.

Mr Chairman,

As the current Chair of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, Croatia was very much pleased to contribute to the women, peace and security agenda by organizing - jointly with UN Women - the High-Level UNGA Event on “Women’s Economic Empowerment for Peacebuilding”.

The key objective of this high level gathering was to collectively renew commitment and sharpen global focus on women’s role as agents of positive change and transformation in the countries emerging from a conflict. Its purpose was also to invite the broader United Nations membership to boost women’s economic rights as an essential contribution to peacebuilding.

With its specific transitional and peaceful integration knowledge and experience, where women played exceptionally important role, Croatia has been contributing so far to various UN peacekeeping missions and operations.

In conclusion, we stand ready to engage even more actively within the UN activities in support to our joint efforts in the sphere of women’s rights and empowerment. That is our duty towards 3.5 billion of women on this globe, half of the total human potential, many of them victims of gender-based violence and discrimination right at this moment. Let’s intensify our political battle and accelerate international efforts to create the environment free of violence for women and girls, the environment of equal opportunities for all.

Thank you!