

**Ms. Kadare** (Albania): I would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency for convening this open debate to raise awareness of the acute issue of conflict-related sexual violence. I also wish to thank the briefers for their informative and powerful interventions, and most particularly Ms. Mina Jaf for sharing with us the perspective of civil society.

Albania aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union, and I wish to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

Over the past decade, the Security Council has amply identified the scourge of sexual violence in conflict as a devastating tactic of war and terrorism and has recognized it as an issue that affects international peace and security. Today we have a better understanding of the scope and roots of the problem than ever before. In terms of international legal and normative instruments, we have the tools required to take significant action, including seven Security Council resolutions.

In September 2013, 144 countries, including Albania, co-signed the historic Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, thus marking an unprecedented level of momentum and political will.

Yet the shocking and unacceptable reality is that despite our collective efforts and despite international awareness and outrage, conflict-related sexual violence continues unabated and largely unpunished. The real challenge facing us is how to convert our political will into action on the ground; how to implement our objectives in real conflicts, thus effecting change in the lives of millions of vulnerable children, men and women. The challenges to effectively combating this crime are multiple: lack of accountability for the perpetrators, weak Government response, insufficient reporting of the facts, poor monitoring and inadequate support services for the victims, who also have to face the shame, the stigma and the risk of retaliation.

In addition, the lack of adequate national capacity and expertise necessary to prevent, investigate and prosecute perpetrators remains among the main impediments in combating sexual violence. It is critical that the United Nations increase its efforts to strengthen national capacities. In this context, I would like to join other colleagues and express Albania's support for the excellent work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, as well as the partnership between Justice Rapid Response and UN-Women for their endeavours to end impunity for perpetrators.

Albania welcomes the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/249) and its comprehensive analysis of current trends as well as emerging concerns. Most importantly, we support the implementation of its action-oriented recommendations. We pay tribute to the relentless work of the United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Bangura, and would like to congratulate Ms. Patten on her new appointment in this important

mandate.

But while the United Nations has a crucial role to play, it is commitment and action by the parties to a conflict that are the key to changing the situation on the ground. Every Government has a responsibility to adopt protective measures, develop investigation mechanisms and put in place policies that protect its people from sexual violence, whether perpetrated by the Government's own forces or by terrorists, in times of conflict or peace. When States fail to comply, the International Criminal Court, whose jurisdiction is universal, can and must fulfill its role in ensuring accountability.

In closing, I would like to stress that Albania believes that there should be zero tolerance for any form of sexual violence, in all circumstances and at all times. We member States should unite in our efforts to eradicate this horrendous crime through a comprehensive and integrated approach that entails prevention, early warning, justice, accountability, and assistance and reparations for survivors.

Today we in this Chamber stand in solidarity with the anonymous and forgotten victims of sexual violence, whose rights and dignity matter.