

Mr. Islam (Bangladesh): Bangladesh thanks the French presidency for convening today's open debate.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

In open debates on women and peace and security, Bangladesh usually focuses on a particular set of issues. This time, however, we have to depart from that. One of the briefers this morning referred to the crisis in Myanmar. That description hardly captures the grim realities of the catastrophe. In the past two months, nearly 600,000 people, mostly Rohingya and the majority of them women and children, have fled to Bangladesh in sheer desperation to save their lives and dignity. Thousands are still arriving on an almost daily basis. In her address to the General Assembly this year, our Prime Minister said that the

“forcibly displaced people of Myanmar are fleeing an ethnic cleansing in their own country, where they have been living for centuries.” (A/72/PV.14, p. 14)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also termed it a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.

As is evident from numerous eyewitness accounts, rape and sexual violence have been systematically used as a main tactic by Myanmar security forces in order to drive the Rohingya out of Myanmar and prevent them from returning to their homes. In its report released on 11 October, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights rapid response mission to Bangladesh says that

“[w]ell into the course of the mission, more and more information began to be shared both by girls and women who had survived rape or other forms of sexual violence. Information was collected related to girls as young as five to seven years of age who had been raped, often in front of their relatives, and sometimes by three to five men taking turns, all dressed in army uniforms.”

The rest of the report makes disturbing reading, but to cite further,

“[t]estimonies also indicate that many women, even ones who were pregnant, were raped. In several cases, women and girls were reportedly raped in their homes and at police stations, and at other times in full view of family members, including children; anyone trying to protect their female kin was dealt with severely by the perpetrators.”

The Special Advisers of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect, respectively, have made a compelling case, and in their words,

“Myanmar has failed to meet its obligations under international law and primary responsibility to protect the Rohingya population from atrocity crimes. The international community has equally failed its responsibilities in this regard.”

As a country that played an instrumental role in the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), we cannot remain silent or objective in the face of such atrocities happening just across our border in total impunity. In Bangladesh, our humanitarian partners are trying, to the extent that they can, to provide support to the women and girls who have survived rape and sexual violence. Special priority has been given to supporting the nearly 2,000 pregnant women who have fled to Bangladesh so far. Properly addressing the gender-sensitive issues of protection and assistance in already overcrowded camps, amid vulnerable host communities, is an uphill task. The team of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict is visiting the camps this weekend, while the Special Representative herself will be there the following week. She had previously urged the Myanmar authorities to issue clear orders through the military chain of command to prohibit such crimes, conduct rigorous investigation and accountability processes, institute training for the security forces and implement a policy of zero tolerance, in line with resolution 2106 (2013), on sexual violence in conflict.

It is high time to move past words into action. The Security Council has spoken with one voice in condemning the violence, but it must show its resolve by sending an unequivocal message to Myanmar through a resolution calling for an immediate cessation of the violence and unfettered humanitarian access for all those affected, as well as for action to ensure the safe, dignified and sustained return of all those who have been forcibly displaced to Bangladesh and accountability for the perpetrators.

The significant number of Member States that today have reaffirmed their commitment to ending sexual violence during armed conflict should also demonstrate their support for the draft resolution being steered through the General Assembly by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. If Member States unite and stand behind that draft resolution, it would assure the people who have been violated, battered, forcibly evicted and traumatized that they are entitled to return to their place of residence in safety, security and dignity, and can consider doing so. Only if, and when, they can voluntarily return to Myanmar can the road map outlined by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State make a real, meaningful difference on the ground.

Bangladesh will continue to pursue its bilateral efforts with Myanmar as far as it can, but the international community must accompany us in the process. The Rohingya women and girls have not yet had a chance to have their voices heard in this Council, but as the Special Advisers have said, “Once again, our failure to stop atrocity crimes makes us complicit.”