

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia):

Let me start by expressing appreciation to you, Sir, for organizing this open debate and for being here again to highlight the great significance of the meeting today. I wish to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, Under-Secretary-General Adama Dieng and Ms. Mina Jaf for their insightful briefings. It also gives me pleasure to welcome the Defence Minister of Sweden, and I thank him for being at this meeting. At a time when the number of victims of sexual violence targeted by parties to armed conflicts and terrorists is on the rise, this debate could not be more appropriate and relevant in the endeavour to mobilize efforts for concerted and effective international action aimed at preventing and responding to this growing problem.

The annual report (S/2017/249) of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence, which was issued last month, with its thorough analysis of current trends and emerging concerns regarding sexual violence in conflict as a tactic of war and terrorism, certainly provides a useful framework for our discussion. Sexual exploitation and abuse have indeed become rampant in various conflict and post-conflict operations and are often linked to other grave crimes, such as killings and the recruitment and use of child soldiers. It has also been used as a tactic of war by armed groups, particularly extremist and terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, to terrorize the civilian population and achieve strategic objectives. Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in countries in conflict, including children, have in many instances been subjected to conflict-related sexual violence, and it should be remembered that such acts are considered war crimes under international law.

The report of the Secretary-General and the recommendations contained therein could form an important basis for addressing sexual violence in various conflict and post-conflict situations. They will have particular significance in the consideration of specific conflict or post-conflict situations, and the Council should explore the ways and means of ensuring the implementation of the relevant recommendations, including by assigning protection advisers. The Council should encourage or pressure, as appropriate, all parties to an armed conflict to fully comply with international humanitarian law, particularly in relation to the protection of civilians. The implementation by Member States of the relevant regional and international legal instruments for the prevention, punishment and eradication of all forms of violence against women would also contribute to better national, regional and international responses to victims of sexual violence. The need to enhance the capacity of peacekeeping missions to prevent conflict-related sexual violence — particularly through increased participation by women in peacekeeping, the provision of gender-sensitive predeployment training on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, and the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy — has already been recognized, as has the need to involve women and other vulnerable groups in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Where serious violations have occurred, the individuals or groups responsible for such grave violations of international humanitarian law should certainly be held accountable, as allowing impunity is no less a crime. It is important to strengthen peacebuilding efforts aimed at rebuilding national capacity and institutions, particularly the capacity of the security sector

and the judiciary to fight impunity and bring perpetrators to justice. However, what is needed in order to sustainably prevent sexual exploitation and violence is to address the root causes of conflict. That applies, of course, to all of the crimes and inhumane acts that usually follow violent conflicts. Moreover, as the Deputy Secretary-General stressed, in our efforts to ensure success in the fight against sexual exploitation and violence, we must never overlook what takes place at the family and societal levels, since that lays the foundation for what takes place, in a more egregious manner, during times of violence.

We believe that enhancing global and regional partnerships in the fight against conflict-related sexual violence should form an important part of the international response in conflict and post-conflict situations. In that connection, the African Union has demonstrated its commitment to fighting impunity and holding accountable those responsible for conflict-related sexual violence. The joint efforts of the United Nations and the African Union are imperative, not only in the fight against sexual exploitation and violence in conflicts but also in supporting the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda on the continent. The close cooperation and coordination provided by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission are important, and the implementation of the framework for cooperation between the two organizations will go a long way towards ensuring greater coordination of efforts.

Finally, with regard to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers, we reiterate our strong condemnation of all such acts throughout the United Nations system and reaffirm our commitment to support the implementation of the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. We welcome the Secretary-General's commitment to preventing and combating such abuses. We support the measures he is undertaking, including through the appointment of the special coordinator and the establishment of a high-level task force to develop a strategy for improving the United Nations response.