

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber
Statement by Mr. Quinlan Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations.

I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2014/181) and personal leadership against sexual violence in conflict, and Special Representative Bangura for her fearlessness.

Both have been instrumental in driving the unprecedented global commitment we have to ending conflict-related sexual violence. But the challenge, as we know, simply never ceases.

Last week in South Sudan, we witnessed the horror of radio-broadcast hate speech inciting rape and sexual violence against women and girls as a brutal weapon of war. It is very dangerous being a woman or a girl when the rule of law fails and insecurity prevails. I also thank Ms. Misaka for her briefing, which has been a good and inspirational reminder of how essential it is that the entire international community — the Council, Governments, regional organizations, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations — work collaboratively and actively to combat sexual violence.

We support regular briefings to the Council by such experts.

The international prohibition on sexual violence in conflict is long-standing, but our plan for combating it has not previously been laid out. That is why the advances last year were so important. Those include the adoption of resolution 2106 (2013), setting out a comprehensive prevention framework, and the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, signed now by over 140 nations. We congratulate the United Kingdom and Foreign Secretary Hague on their efforts on the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, in which Australia's Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, is an active champion.

Our challenge, now as always, is implementation—turning the resolutions into solutions, as Ms. Bangura has just said. Fundamental to that is timely and comprehensive information. Unhindered humanitarian access is essential, as are measures to fight the stigma and threats of reprisal against survivors, which impede its reporting. Increasing the numbers of women in peacekeeping missions and police units can help, and we must address barriers to their recruitment, deployment and retention. We must ensure the early deployment of women protection advisers in United Nations missions. Commitments on the part of Governments and parties to conflict to combating sexual violence are crucial to change on the ground. We commend Special Representative Bangura for securing new commitments with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. Reaching armed groups is hard, but we must try. Ceasefire agreements should always include sexual violence as a prohibited act.

Specific actions to prevent sexual violence must be included in security sector reform, rule of law initiatives and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. As resolution 2117 (2013) recognized, the misuse of small arms and light weapons exacerbates sexual violence, and we call on all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Arms Trade Treaty. There must be situation-specific training for all peacekeeping personnel, including military and police, that addresses the full range of sexual violence crimes, including abductions, forced marriage and sexual slavery. Particular attention must also be given to the needs of the most vulnerable populations, including the marginalized, children, older persons, indigenous communities, people with disabilities and displaced persons. The needs of men and boy survivors must also be considered.

As Ms. Misaka reminded the Council this morning, it is crucial that survivors have quick access to comprehensive services, including sexual and reproductive health services and psychosocial, legal and livelihood support. We must confront the issue of pregnancy as a result of rape, particularly where abortion services are illegal and the health consequences of unsafe abortion and a lack of maternity care are dire.

Civil society and women's organizations providing services and giving political voice to women affected by conflict must also be adequately resourced.

Australian Foreign Minister Bishop announced in Jordan this week a \$20-million contribution to the United Nations "No lost generation" initiative to support Syrian refugee children, including child survivors of sexual violence. Sexual violence is a persistent and deliberate feature of the conflict in Syria, brutalizing civilians and displacing populations, and is a constant threat in the refugee camps, themselves. Decisively, we must move beyond just the immediate or short-term provision of support, vital though it is.

Empowering survivors with their own economic future can be a transformative way to reconstruct their lives. Obviously, accountability is centrally important. States must accept their primary obligation to investigate and prosecute sexual violence crimes, provide support for survivors and protect witnesses who testify. Teams of experts working to support local justice mechanisms can have lasting impacts. As part of the regional peacebuilding mission to Solomon Islands, Australia has mentored female Solomon Islands police to take victim statements, compile evidence and support survivors throughout court processes. Such models are naturally being applied elsewhere and should have broad application.

Where national jurisdictions are unable or unwilling to prosecute perpetrators, the Council should consider referrals to the International Criminal Court. Targeted Council sanctions have a clear role to play — to expose and circumscribe the perpetrators and create a powerful deterrent to others. The current events in South Sudan encapsulate the challenges we face in that regard. In consultations two days ago, the Security Council was told the exact times and the content of the media broadcasts inciting rape and the names of the individuals who made them. We must ensure that they are held to account.

To conclude, the Security Council's debate on sexual violence may only take place once a year, but our work to end that barbaric practice — that crime — must be a daily commitment and attract our serious attention across the whole of our agenda. The Council must take every opportunity available and use every tool it has to end that abhorrent crime and provide survivors the justice and services they need to rebuild their lives.