

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Quinlan, Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations.

We very much welcome and, indeed, need this open debate on sexual violence on conflict.

I express my thanks to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2013/149) and his personal leadership, and to Special Representative Bangura for her forthright commitment and achievements, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security for its impressive work and to Ms. Saran Keïta Diakité for her own exemplary efforts.

In so much of the Council's work, including in Mali, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria, we have heard repeatedly over the past few weeks about the widespread use of sexual violence in conflict. It is a brutal, unacceptable but pervasive dimension of conflict today. We must constantly think about how we can prevent it from occurring, and, when it does, we must ensure that survivors are supported and perpetrators held relentlessly to account.

The Secretary-General's report is stark. It highlights too much of concern: sexual slavery, forced marriage by armed groups, increasing abuse of boys and men, the plight of children born of rape, the nexus between sexual violence and the illicit extraction of natural resources, and, as we have seen in Syria, the threat and use of sexual violence to forcibly displace entire communities. That must catalyze even stronger action by us.

Ending impunity is critical to driving change. As a deterrent, it is a critical part of a prevention strategy. We must make the best use of the tools at the Council's disposal to target perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict, whether individuals, armed groups or States, and whether they commit, command or condone violations. Under many Sanctions Committees, persistent perpetrators fit within existing listing criteria, and we support the more rigorous application of those. We also support the inclusion of such criteria where the situation demands it.

At the national and international levels, criminal justice mechanisms must develop dedicated sexual violence expertise to ensure that crimes are effectively prosecuted, survivors get the support they need, and perpetrators are convicted. In that context, we would like to single out and welcome the United Kingdom's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, its efforts through the Group of Eight and the exemplary focus and resourcing that the United Kingdom itself has brought to the investigation and prosecution of sexual violence.

We also agree with the Secretary-General's recommendation that sexual violence should be included in the definition of acts prohibited under ceasefires agreements, and support the introduction of a systematic procedure to monitor parties' compliance with their commitments.

Security sector reform, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, are essential to rebuilding communities. Measures against sexual violence must be integral to them. Too often, perpetrators of sexual violence are themselves allowed to assume positions of power in post-conflict settings. We must strengthen efforts to ensure appropriate levels of preventive vetting.

We strongly support the systematic deployment of gender expertise in all Council-mandated missions, including women protection advisers, whose deployment must be prioritised in mission planning processes. We also support the deployment of the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Supporting women's leadership and participation is essential to addressing, responding to, and indeed ending sexual violence. Women are powerful agents of change, and we must harness that capacity by promoting their far greater participation in conflict resolution and post-conflict transitions.

Ms. Keïta Diakité reminded us this morning of the nexus between arms and conflict-related sexual violence. In that connection we welcome the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty, including the requirement that States parties consider, in making their export assessments, the risks of arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence. We must now focus on the Treaty's entry into force and its effective implementation.

It is essential that survivors' needs be addressed, including through access to multisectoral services. Often, the vast majority of survivors are children, and services must be very specifically tailored to their needs. We must take specific steps to also address the risks faced by women's human rights defenders operating on the front lines, so as to ensure that they are able to carry out their work and do not themselves become victims of sexual violence.

Action to address sexual violence in conflict cannot occur without adequate and predictable resourcing. Priority should be given to ensuring that key actors, including national institutions, United Nations agencies and civil society groups, have the resources and capacity needed to tackle such issues, ranging from prevention and service provision for survivors to longer-term measures to end impunity. My own Government announced last year an additional \$320 million for activities in our own immediate region to focus on those kinds of needs.

In conclusion, sexual violence touches upon the full breadth of the Council's work. While success is very obviously difficult to achieve, it requires of us vigilant and consistent commitment if we are ever to end this devastating, immoral and criminal practice.