

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

Statement by Ms. Čolaković, Permanent Mission of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United Nations.

I wish to thank your delegation once again, Mr. President, for having convened this important open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General; the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura; and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security for their very important briefings today.

Bosnia and Herzegovina aligns itself with the statement delivered today by the observer of the European Union and welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/149) on the implementation of Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security and the recommendations contained therein.

Conflict and post-conflict situations are often marked by violence and the deprivation of rights. In armed conflicts, sexual violence represents one of the most serious forms of violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The lack of progress on the issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, in particular against women and girls, remains of great concern for us. We condemn all forms of crimes against women and girls, and we emphasize the importance of bringing those responsible for such crimes to justice. All parties to armed conflict need to take appropriate measures to protect civilians, especially women and children, from all forms of sexual violence. It is essential to ensure that all reports of sexual violence committed by civilians or by military personnel be thoroughly investigated and the alleged perpetrators brought to justice.

Bosnia and Herzegovina attaches the utmost importance to confronting the grave issue of sexual violence and is particularly encouraged by the commitment of the Security Council to keep the matter on its agenda. That commitment was unequivocally demonstrated by the adoption of resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1894 (2009), which paved the way for concrete action aimed at preventing sexual violence. We fully support the work of the United Nations in addressing sexual violence in armed conflict, particularly that of UN-Women, and the mandates of the Secretary-General's Special Representatives on Children in Armed Conflict and on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We underscore the responsibility of States and parties to conflict to observe and uphold their international obligations and respect international humanitarian law, which grants special protection to women and children.

Involving women in conflict prevention and mediation is therefore essential to building peace and reinforcing the foundations of democracy. Women's participation remains low in both the official and observer roles. We therefore need to intensify all our efforts to ensure women's full participation in the processes of conflict prevention and resolution, the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and early peacebuilding and post-conflict planning, as well as in enhancing women's role in decision-making processes.

Integrating a gender perspective into peacekeeping policies and the promotion of women's participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations is fundamental to a more effective performance on the ground. Recruiting women in the civil, military and police components of peacekeeping missions can encourage local women to report incidents of sexual violence and can also contribute to establishing better communication with local communities. We will spare no effort to advance on that issue. The relevant authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina have adopted a policy that one third of the nominated candidates for peacekeeping missions must be women.

We believe that countries should work on adopting national action plans or strategies in order to integrate issues related to women and peace and security, and gender issues, into their national policies and create a broader basis for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). Moreover, it is also important to increase State institutions and services' knowledge and capacity in order to implement the resolution and collaborate effectively with international organizations and civil society. Here I would recall that Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted both a national action plan for the resolution's implementation and a gender action plan. Those two documents are crucial to streamlining activities related to the women and peace and security agenda in the relevant sectors and to accelerating the resolution's implementation in our country.

With the aim of improving the overall situation of women victims of rape, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina is finalizing the drafting of the document entitled "Programme for the victims of rape, sexual abuse and torture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2013-2016", which will seek to improve the position of all the victims. One of the goals of the programme emphasizes the obligation of the State to provide access to reparations programmes for victims of war and the need to provide legal and psychological support to victims and witnesses during and after court proceedings. The draft strategy on transitional justice has been prepared, and we are currently in the process of obtaining the opinions of all levels of Government in that respect.

Finally, we would like to point out that the international community has taken noteworthy steps, including the adoption of the relevant resolutions, to tackle the issue of sexual violence. But more importantly, the time has come to start converting commitments and promises into real actions on the ground to prevent violence, protect individuals, punish perpetrators and provide redress to victims. Bosnia and Herzegovina stands ready to contribute to those efforts.