

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

Statement by Ms. Vanda Pignato, Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations.

I should like to thank you, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to tell the Council, very briefly, about the situation in El Salvador with regard to sexual violence and gender-based violence in general, 21 years after the signing of the peace agreements that brought our past armed conflict to an end.

As is well known and has been repeated here on many occasions, post-conflict societies also face significant challenges in combating and eliminating sexual violence. That is an extensive phenomenon; it is deeply rooted in our societies and predates the conditions that have led to armed conflict.

After the end of the civil war, El Salvador lived through two decades in which gender policies and attention to human rights violations were not high on the Government's agenda. To be honest, little, if anything, was done to ensure access to justice by victims and to fight impunity, and even less to establish measures that would lead to reparations for victims.

We all know very well that, after the chaos of armed conflict, the fundamental institutions of a country are left in a general state of weakness and dependency, with limited and low levels of economic and human resources. Such countries usually take a long time to achieve the strengthening of their institutions to a degree that would allow them to be functional at an acceptable level. That is the situation in which El Salvador finds itself only four years after political change came about. At that time, a new democratic force came to power that was committed to defending human rights and promoting policies of social inclusion. Among those policies are gender equality and fighting sexual violence.

In fact, the Government of President Mauricio Funes Cartagena is fighting against those conservative sectors that in the past were responsible for establishing virtually feudal systems of power between the politically and economically wealthy, on the one hand, and the majority of the impoverished population, deprived of their rights and guarantees, on the other.

In recent years, with the invaluable help of the international community and multilateral organizations, El Salvador has witnessed visible changes. For the first time in our history, a policy defending and guaranteeing human rights and social rights was established and we began to wage a battle to eradicate violence in all its forms. In the area of public safety, El Salvador is now experiencing an unprecedented era in which crime has drastically dropped, especially the number of murders. In just one year, statistical data shows, violent deaths have dropped by 52 per cent — whereas we used to have a rate of 70 deaths per 100,000, it is now 30 per 100,000. Cases of femicide have also dropped, with a clear downward trend, and last year the rate of femicide was down by 50 per cent.

Parallel to those efforts, the Salvadoran Government has strongly promoted a campaign against gender-based violence and sexual violence in general on different fronts. We have strengthened legislation with the approval of the comprehensive special act on violence-free lives for women. The entry into force of that new piece of legislation has been fundamental in enabling the State to exercise its responsibilities in defending, protecting and guaranteeing the rights of women.

In 2011, the programme entitled Ciudad Mujer was launched, an unprecedented experiment in Latin America of gender-equality policies. It makes invisible people visible in public policy. It provides comprehensive care to women, particularly from poorer backgrounds. It gives them support in

gender violence — particularly sexual violence — training, entrepreneurship education and training to enter the work force, as well as in sexual and reproductive health.

Ciudad Mujer started in March 2011 with the opening of its first centre. There are now another three centres. More than 140,000 women have participated in the programme, with more than 260,000 services having been provided to date. That policy has been recognized by eminent persons throughout the world as being an outstanding gender equality policy.

Finally, the President, through the secretariat for social inclusion and the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development, is currently promoting a large-scale awareness-raising campaign to combat violence against women, which is having a huge social impact. For the first time in El Salvador, we now have a clear policy to combat sexual- and gender-based violence, with particular concern for the principles enshrined by the United Nations on this matter. We now need the ongoing support of the international community.

We particularly need the assistance of the United Nations, given the paramount role it played as mediator in our 1992 peace agreements, so that the accomplishments of the past few years do not lose momentum and so that there is no possibility of a return to the past in those areas.

The Government of El Salvador is thus strongly committed to combating impunity and to providing access to redress for victims, as can be seen on a daily basis in the Ciudad Mujer programme. For that reason, it is important that the international community follow that process in El Salvador and that political support and cooperation be provided, so that, in the short term, the positive results of the current compensation policies can be seen on a large scale.