

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (Sexual Violence)

23rd February 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E. Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

I speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The acceding country Croatia, the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, align themselves with this declaration.

I first wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Margot Wallström, as well as Mr. Hervé Ladsous and Ms. Amina Megheirbi, as the civil society representative, for their statements.

Sexual violence in armed conflict remains alarmingly widespread. It includes instances of systematic targeting of civilians by armed forces and groups, with the aim to destroy and humiliate. It is a crime and a serious violation of human rights that remains underreported — due to stigmatization, the possibility of reprisal and the perception that justice and aid would be hard or unlikely to come by.

We therefore welcome the report (S/2012/33) of the Secretary-General and the work of Special Representative Wallström on the implementation of the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security.

The establishment of the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence has made an important contribution towards more systematic and detailed information flow to the Council. We especially appreciate the information provided on parties to armed conflict credibly suspected of committing, or being responsible for, acts of rape or other forms of sexual violence, as well as the list of parties annexed to the report. The systematic collection of accurate, reliable and objective information is a crucial basis for timely action to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence.

We commend the coordination and cooperation envisioned in the implementation of those arrangements with the relevant parts of the United Nations system, including the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the human rights components of the United Nations peacekeeping missions. We welcome the finalization of the terms of reference of the women's protection advisers and call for their swift designation within the United Nations missions' human rights and gender components. Preventing sexual violence should be our utmost priority. We therefore welcome the development of early warning indicators specific to conflict-related sexual violence and the scenario based predeployment training modules by the United Nations system, which we hope will enhance the capacity of the peacekeepers to respond. A holistic approach that includes women's full participation in decision-making in peace and security is key to effectively preventing and responding to sexual violence.

It is crucial to sustained peace and development that we address impunity for sexual violence. It is the duty of all States to investigate and prosecute those crimes. We commend the efforts of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law, including their support to countries in ending impunity — for example, through assistance to prosecution support cells established by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the deployment of female magistrates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also encourage the Council to use all means at its disposal to end impunity for sexual violence in conflict, including through referrals to International Criminal Court, mandating commissions of inquiry and by explicitly condemning such violations.

We call on the Council to continue to make use of the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence, including by using the list contained in the report, as a basis for more focused United Nations engagement with the parties listed, including, as appropriate, measures in accordance with the procedures of the relevant sanctions committees. We hope that the Secretary-General's report will also encourage the inclusion of additional information in relevant country-specific reports and consistent reporting across different country situations.

Finally, the European Union continues to implement its dedicated policy on women, peace and security, adopted in 2008, making use of tools as diverse as development cooperation, the Common Security and Defence Policy and political dialogue. The varied EU support to initiatives related to women, peace and security amounts to approximately €200 million per year.

The European Union now has gender advisers or focal points in each of its crisis management missions around the world. We continue our work on specific training modules on human rights and gender in crisismanagement, ensuring a focus on sexual violence in armed conflicts. The EU continues to work closely with the United Nations — for example, through its support to UN-Women in carrying out the project “Women Connect across Conflicts”, which is aimed at building accountability for the implementation of the Council's relevant resolutions.

The European Union and its member States highly appreciate the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as well as that of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. We will continue to engage with the Office of the Special Representative and welcome its contribution to strengthening the efforts of the United Nations, Member States and all actors involved in preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence.