

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict
16th-17th December 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Mr. Isoze-Ngondet, Permanent Mission of Gabon to the United Nations

My delegation welcomes the holding of this meeting under your presidency Madam, devoted to sexual violence in armed conflict. We also welcome the participation in this debate of His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, whom we thank for his introduction of his report (S/2010/604) on the follow-up to the implementation of resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009). We reiterate to him Gabon's full support in the fight he has carried out since 2008 as part of the UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign, along with the participation of all the partners involved in this cause. We also thank Ms. Margot Wallström, Mr. Alain Le Roy and Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye for their respective briefings. I would like here to reiterate to Ms. Wallström Gabon's strong support in her work.

Sexual violence against women and girls is simultaneously a war crime, a crime against humanity and a grave threat to peace and security. In spite of the enormous efforts made by the international community on the ground to bring it to an end — in implementation of resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009) — too many women and girls continue to be victims of rape, sexual slavery and every other sort of sexual violence. Basing myself on the report of the Secretary-General, I should like to refer to three aspects, namely, improving protection for vulnerable populations on the ground, especially women and girls; strengthening legal provisions to better combat impunity; and strengthening the means for preventing outbreaks of sexual violence during conflicts.

With regard to improving protection for vulnerable populations, Gabon would like to underscore the importance of ensuring better protection for women and girls in the field. In that regard, we would like to highlight the enormous efforts made by peacekeeping missions, which too often operate in difficult situations and in places that severely challenge their efforts to ensure effective protection for those at risk.

However, the incidents of widespread systematic rape in the Walikale region in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrate both the limits of our ability and the scope of the challenge to overcome. This is a huge and complicated undertaking that demands that we bolster our monitoring and communications capabilities in order to provide better information about reality on the ground. In that regard, we support the Secretary-General's recommendation underscoring the need for better analysis of information and reporting of sexual violence committed during armed conflict, with a view to better coordination in the field. We should also improve our rapid-deployment capacity in affected regions, as recommended in paragraph 26 of resolution 1888 (2009).

However, our efforts will not produce the desired results without more sustained dialogue with all parties to a conflict. Among other things, such a dialogue come about by providing psychological support for victims and carrying out awareness-raising efforts among those involved. It is our belief that women themselves could play such roles.

With regard to strengthening provisions to combat impunity, my delegation believes that it is essential to make that concern part of the system for comprehensive protection against sexual violence in armed conflict. In that regard, we should welcome the progress made in international criminal law in this area. The International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda were the first to announce indictments for the use of rape as a weapon of war. Likewise the Tribunal for Sierra Leone has for the first time issued a guilty verdict for sexual slavery.

In the same vein, we are convinced that the Secretary-General's proposal to annex to his reports on this issue a list of the names of those who carry out sexual violence should serve as a effective instrument for deterrence. However, as we noted during the last debate on the protection of civilians (S/PV.6427), combating impunity is chiefly the responsibility of States. That is why my delegation highlights the need to help countries emerging from conflict to develop reliable judicial structures.

The fight against sexual violence in armed conflicts requires prevention first and foremost. From that angle, the Member States, the United Nations, donors and civil society must resolutely take that approach. Raising

awareness regarding the serious danger that sexual violence can create in society should guide their actions. Early warning mechanisms that can detect indicator signs in due time are also essential pillars for actions aimed at eradicating sexual violence in armed conflicts.

It is equally vital in that exercise that a privileged place be given to women themselves. As we have seen from experience, their perceptions and commitment are undeniable and unparalleled. Not to take that fact into account would mean to deprive ourselves of an advantage in the fight against the discrimination and violence of which women and girls are the chief victims. That is particularly true in the context of the truth and reconciliation processes, which are a proven means to help battered societies and peoples recover from the agony of war and violence.

Resolution 1960 (2010), adopted earlier today by the Security Council and which was co-sponsored by my country, takes into account the chief concerns that I have just mentioned and represents accordingly an important step for targeted, strengthened action on the part of the international community with respect to that matter