

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 24th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Carrera, Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations.

I am very pleased and honoured to be participating once again in an open debate of the Security Council. My presence here on this occasion is due to several reasons.

First, it is a clear signal of our continued support for this United Nations forum. Secondly, it is in response to Secretary Hague's kind and timely personal invitation, extended some months ago when we met in London to discuss various multilateral issues of mutual interest to the United Kingdom and Guatemala; this issue in particular was very high on the agenda on that occasion. Thirdly, it highlights the importance of the issue, which was also addressed during our presidency of the Council last October, during which the Council issued presidential statement S/PRST/2012/23.

Fourthly, I should say that in my professional life I have always been concerned with the grave problem of violence against women in general and on the impact it has on every aspect of economic and social development. This type of violence, which is particularly associated with the impunity that results from weak rule of law institutions, will surely form part, among other things, of the post-2015 development agenda that we will be debating in the General Assembly. Finally, I can state that President Otto Pérez Molina views combating violence against women as an absolute priority of his Government. If we do not eradicate gender violence we will not have security and peace in Guatemala or anywhere else in the world.

Before moving on, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the concept note you have circulated (S/2013/335, annex), and to express our appreciation to the briefers we have heard today, especially Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Ms. Zainab Bangura. We are also grateful for the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2013/149), and would like to express our appreciation to the delegations of India and Rwanda for having organized debates on the subject during their respective presidencies in November 2012 and April this year.

Sexual violence in situations of armed conflict is an unacceptable phenomenon, a crime against humanity, and an insult to the world's conscience, as expressed through the actions of the Security Council and every organ of the United Nations. It has been the subject of numerous debates, presidential statements and resolutions of the Council in this very Chamber. Its development is built on the basic premise of resolution 1325 (2000), which is that without security for women, lasting peace is impossible. That was followed by resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010), and has culminated today in the adoption of resolution 2106 (2013), aimed at expanding the conceptual framework of the struggle against this scourge. At the same time, we have established concrete policies, including the creation of the post presently occupied by Ms. Bangura and the assignment of experts to many peacekeeping operations, among others.

However, the phenomenon persists, as we have sadly seen in situations such as those in Syria, Mali, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In other words, the Council is acting, but, without denying the value of our proactive stance, we must recognize that our concrete impact on the ground continues to be relatively modest. The question we must ask, then, is what more can we do so that our decisions are translated into concrete action?

One promising approach lies in insisting more firmly that States make an ongoing priority of rule of law reform and strengthening their national institutions, including the civil and military justice systems, in order to address sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, and to combat impunity for those that commit this type of crime. For that we unquestionably need political will, as

we have heard, but we also need effective institutions. It is equally crucial to act on current situations where most of the victims of such crimes face a wall of impunity. We must act so that the truth comes out regarding the suffering of women and so that the perpetrators are held accountable for their acts. Acknowledging the truth and undertaking efforts aimed at achieving justice and promoting reconciliation are the minimum we should do to restore and re-establish the dignity of the victims.

Guatemala's own internal conflict was resolved over 15 years ago, but there still are hundreds of victims of sexual violence committed by various armed perpetrators. Happily, and as I have already indicated, preventing violence against women is a priority of the Guatemalan State today. We recently enacted a law against murder and other forms of violence against women, and one prohibiting sexual violence, exploitation and human trafficking, which has enabled us to reform the codification of various crimes in the Guatemalan penal code. Furthermore, in a measure designed to improve the access of female victims of violence to justice, various programmes have been established in the executive and judicial branches to help eliminate impunity as it affects women. In that regard, our Ministry of the Interior, the Office of the Prosecutor and the courts, with technical and financial support from various United Nations agencies, have strengthened their capacity for prosecuting crimes related to violence against women.

As has been done in Guatemala, the issue of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations should be reflected in concrete decisions included in peace accords, especially in matters related to security and transitional justice. We support the Council's promotion of peace and reconciliation processes and agreements ending conflicts that address the issue explicitly and thus promote respect for the dignity of victims.

Finally, Guatemala strongly supports the elimination of obstacles to women's access to justice in conflict and post-conflict situations. That was one of the subjects of presidential statement S/PRST/2012/23, issued under Guatemala's presidency of the Security Council in October. As part of the fight against impunity regarding sexual violence, that statement also included a firm condemnation of all acts against women and girls that violate international law on armed-conflict and post-conflict situations.

Before concluding, I would like to go off script to mention that my 13-year-old daughter Laura is with me in this Chamber. At 13 years of age I met a victim of sexual violence in conflict for the first time, a woman who was tortured and raped about 40 times. Subsequently, I have to say that I have witnessed such victims in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil and Colombia. We are thus discussing an issue that many Latin American women have suffered from. I would like to say here, before my 13-year-old daughter, that in the twenty-first century the world needs freedom and dignity for women and security for them in their lives, so that no young girl or adolescent can ever suffer sexual violence because of an armed conflict or any other circumstance.

In conclusion, we cannot sit by impassably in the face of any kind of sexual violence as a cause or result of armed conflict. We must combat it with every means at our disposal, not only by promoting awareness of its scale, scope and characteristics but also by taking specific actions to address it decisively.