

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ms. Zainab Bangura, the Special Representative of the Secretary General the United Nations.

I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his presence here today and for his personal and steadfast commitment to this issue. I wish to thank the Government of Nigeria for hosting this open debate, which comes at a crucial moment of consolidation of this agenda, as well as the Council for the concerted focus and priority it has given to this issue for several years. I am also grateful that Ambassador Tété António of the African Union (AU) and Ms. Rhoda Misaka, representing civil society, are able to join us to offer their valuable perspectives.

It has been almost two years since I took responsibility for this mandate. I could not have imagined how difficult and heartbreaking it would be. The horrors suffered by the women, children and men that I have met re-affirm my conviction that sexual violence in conflict represents a great moral issue of our time. This crime, in its utter destruction of the individual and the pervasive way in which it undermines the prospects for peace and development, casts a long shadow over our collective humanity. That is why it deserves and requires the singular attention afforded by the Council.

It was a year ago that I visited Bosnia and witnessed first-hand the long-term implications of war-time sexual violence left unaddressed. An estimated 50,000 women were targeted with sexual violence during four years of conflict, but 20 years after the peace was made impunity for these crimes still reigns. The truth, most likely, is that most of the survivors will see no justice because the evidence is long lost and the perpetrators have long since fled the immediate scene of the crime.

Yet, the irony is that those same perpetrators are not so far gone in reality. They still walk among the women and their families, occupying positions of authority and power that shield them from justice. For the victims, those perpetrators are a daily reminder of their broken lives. But the impunity that the perpetrators continue to enjoy is also a reminder to all of us — a reminder of our commitment to justice and accountability.

One of the questions raised by the Secretary-General in this year's report (S/2014/181) is: "What about the children born of rape?" In Bosnia, these children — possibly hundreds or even thousands — are now teenagers. How have they fared? Are they also pursued by stigma and shame? What are their health and psychological needs? What are their prospects for education and employment? For me, the survivors of sexual violence in Bosnia are not only the courageous women that I met; their children and families are also survivors. Therefore, today I once again make an appeal on their behalf. Even if justice in the courts of law has so far been denied, the survivors must have reparations, including livelihood support, education for their children, and the medical and psychosocial services that they deserve and require.

The Secretary-General's report also raises a number of other themes, such as the acute vulnerability of refugee and internally displaced persons' communities, the lack of services for survivors, men and boys as victims, and the concerted focus now required on prevention, among other things. The report covers 21 conflict and post-conflict countries. It lists 34 State and non-State parties credibly suspected to be perpetrators of sexual violence. It paints a grim picture of a problem the full scale, scope and character of which we do not yet fully comprehend. However, today we do understand more about this phenomenon than we did earlier, and that knowledge is a source of hope that we can come to grips with conflict-related sexual violence.

While the road ahead remains long and hard, there is some light on the horizon. Never before in history have we seen such a level of political will and momentum. A historic declaration by the Group of Eight, and

commitment by 144 members of the General Assembly last year, extend and reinforce the consensus that already exists in the Security Council.

Today the circle of stakeholders on this issue is dramatically expanded. This may once have been the concern of the lone gender adviser, but that is no longer the case. Now it also engages political leaders at the highest level, uniformed peacekeepers, mediators, ceasefire monitors, war crimes prosecutors and the full range of civilian protection, justice and security sector actors.

Resolution 2106 (2013) reinforces the infrastructure and the elements of accountability and compliance established by resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010) — an accountability regime based on reliable and timely information and analysis and the political- and operational-level actions that must be taken on the basis of such information. In its scope, operational detail and clarity, resolution 2106 (2013) encompasses the evolution of our understanding of conflict-related sexual violence and what it takes to prevent it. It outlines, for the first time, a framework to curb and prevent this crime.

Therefore, in terms of international legal norms and instruments, we now have the tools required to turn the tide. Our critical challenge now is to convert political will into practical action, to transform the resolutions into solutions and to drive real change on the ground. That progress is crucial, and indicates that addressing conflict-related sexual violence is not a mission impossible. I believe that the progress vindicates the investment and focus of the Security Council, and is an encouragement to the Council to stay the course and reinforce its efforts.

Over the past few years, we have also gained greater clarity on the role that military and other security personnel can play in protection and prevention, and an important investment has been made in training to enhance operational readiness of our peacekeepers. As we continue to drive this agenda on the ground, we will need to consider how to deepen the role of the defence and security sector, peacekeepers as well as national military and police personnel. To better focus our collective action, I believe it will be important to agree and clearly articulate the key priorities for intervention by defence and security sector actors in areas such as military justice; monitoring, information and early-warning; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes; ceasefire monitoring; and in the context of security sector reform. Those priorities are consistent with the elements of prevention under resolution 2106 (2013). Therefore, transforming military cultures to enhance protection and prevention is one of our essential priorities moving forward.

Coming into this role, my priority has been to deepen national ownership, leadership and responsibility. There have been some modest but meaningful gains in that regard. Last year, as the Council heard from the Secretary-General, the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia signed joint communiqués with the United Nations outlining priority areas of intervention to address sexual violence. Those commitments were undertaken at the highest levels of Government and are the basis for implementation plans that are now being developed by the national authorities in concert with the United Nations and other partners.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there were 187 convictions of soldiers and commanders between July 2011 and December 2013, and 39 prosecutions related to the Minova incidents. In Guinea, there have also been high-level indictments related to sexual violence that occurred in 2009 in the wake of the contested elections. The United Nations Team of Experts has also been supporting national authorities in Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire and South Sudan. And in Central African Republic, the Team is supporting the establishment of a specialized rapid response unit of the gendarmerie to deal with sexual violence crimes.

At the regional level, we have signed a framework of cooperation between the United Nations and African Union that outlines key areas in which we intend to strengthen our cooperation, including more operationally oriented training for AU and United Nations peacekeeping personnel.

Unfortunately, the unacceptable reality is that today it is still largely cost-free to rape a woman, child or man in conflict. Sexual violence has been used through the ages precisely because it is such a cheap and devastating weapon. That is why the international community has placed such great emphasis on combating impunity. By focusing on impunity, we direct for the first time a more determined spotlight on the perpetrators, and by so doing we begin to re-direct the stigma and the consequences of sexual violence from the survivors to the perpetrators.

Therefore, I would like to conclude my remarks with a message to the perpetrators: the spotlight is now turned on you, and we are coming after you with all the ways and means at our disposal. There is no hiding place. If you commit, or command, or condone such crimes against humanity, humanity will pursue you relentlessly, and eventually you will be held to account.

That is our solemn promise to the survivors.