

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

Statement by H.E. Mr. Bukun-Ola Onemola, Deputy Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations

First, allow me to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his report (S/2010/604) and his additional remarks here today. It is my firm belief that the work of the Security Council will be greatly enhanced by the report, which contextualizes our understanding of the causes and effects of conflict-related sexual violence. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Alain Le Roy, Military Adviser Babacar Gaye and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Margot Wallström for their briefings.

As the nature of conflict evolves, not only are civilians more frequently targeted, but we are also witnessing a disturbing trend in the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war. The international community is rightly appalled by such trends, and it is also our responsibility to take action to protect civilians and prevent such incidents.

Conflict-related sexual violence can disenfranchise and displace entire communities. Such outcomes are only the beginning of a spiral of social decline triggered by armed conflict. That chain reaction was recognized in resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009), and our efforts to combat impunity, instil cultures of accountability, tackle deep-rooted attitudes and ultimately protect the vulnerable must now be intensified.

All persons of good conscience should be appalled by the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war, visited upon the most vulnerable members of society. Although only recently appointed, Ms. Wallström has already brought sexual violence in conflict firmly into the foreground of the international peace and security landscape. The new momentum she has generated has, we believe, contributed to the arrests of Lieutenant Colonel Mayele and Callixte Mbarushimana in connection with this past summer's mass rapes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

While Special Representative Wallström's fivepoint priority agenda recognizes the cultural and political aspects of the problem, we share her conclusion that sexual violence in conflict is likely to occur where the rule of law is weak and where adequate legal mechanisms and institutions are lacking. Consequently, legal mechanisms to deter the use of systematic sexual violence in conflict situations must be put in place. It is therefore vital that the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law receive sustainable funding to develop institutional safeguards and paths for redress in partnership with Government actors.

Resolution 1960 (2010), which we have just adopted, also speaks to the need for our peacekeepers to be fully equipped and trained to carry out mandated tasks relating to the prevention of and response to sexual violence. In that regard, Nigeria welcomes the Secretary-General's development of operational tools for the implementation of mandates for peacekeepers with regard to the protection of civilians.

The proposed monitoring and reporting mechanism on sexual violence in conflict is a welcome innovation, building upon that already in place under the children and armed conflict agenda. It is our hope that that tool will encourage accountability and produce timely, reliable information and trend analysis, which the Security Council can use to carry out its responsibility to promote the protection of civilians from conflict-related sexual violence. We also believe that there is scope for the Council to make greater use of Special Representative Wallström as a resource, given that her role brings her closer to situations on the ground. Such realities can help ensure the effectiveness of our decisions and actions.

The damage caused by the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war is far reaching. It goes beyond the immediate impact experienced by the individual. It goes beyond the families fragmented by such acts. The scars are deep and are borne by society as a whole. Such acts manifest abhorrent attitudes to women, threaten the progress made toward socioeconomic equality and impede women's participation in peace and democratic processes. An attack involving sexual violence is indeed an attack on peace, stability and development. If we do not arrest that trend, we risk the normalization of sexual violence as a method of war. Such an outcome cannot be countenanced, and Nigeria is accordingly committed to the resolution we have just adopted as the next step towards ending sexual violence in conflict.