

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Eide, Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations.

I have the honour to address the Council on behalf of the Nordic countries, namely, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Norway.

Security threats against women are often dismissed as belonging to the private sphere or are written off as cultural issues. But let us be clear, conflict-related sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, and, in the most extreme cases, an act of genocide. We must respond with the same sense of urgency as we do to other threats against peace and security. We must recognize the need for the participation of both women and men in preventing and solving conflict and, not least, in building sustainable peace.

The report before us (S/2013/149) is a catalogue of violence, rape, atrocities and torture. The Nordic countries welcome the comprehensive approach it takes, covering both protracted crises and emerging concerns. Its attention to sexual violence against men and boys, the practice of forced marriage and the plight of children born as a result of wartime rape is valid and timely. The Nordic countries commend the work of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, and particularly welcome her efforts to foster national leadership, build capacity and hold Governments accountable. During conflict it is national Governments that have the main responsibility to protect civilians, whether from more conventional methods of warfare or from conflict-related sexual violence. All too often they fail to do so.

One glaring example is Syria, where the Government continues to demonstrate its utter failure to protect its own citizens. The use of sexual violence and rape by warring parties in Syria has been reported by the independent international commission of inquiry, as well as by numerous human rights organizations. As thousands of civilians flee from war-torn Syria every day, the world is watching in horror as history repeats itself.

As long as the permanent members of the Security Council remain divided, gross human rights violations are allowed to continue with impunity. In his report, the Secretary-General makes a number of important recommendations to the Security Council on combating impunity. In that connection, the Nordic countries urge Council members, first, to include the women and peace and security agenda in all the relevant Council resolutions and mandates and to put the issue on the agenda of visits to missions.

Secondly, we must ensure that the resolutions on women and peace and security are not only part of Security Council's debates but also have real impact on the ground and that commitments are followed up.

Thirdly, we call on the Security Council to continue to combat impunity for crimes of sexual violence and to use its unique power to increase the pressure through targeted sanctions against perpetrators of sexual violence.

The Nordic countries warmly welcome the Secretary-General's call for emergency contraception and safe abortion to be included in the responses and services to survivors. The agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women also call for the provision of such life-saving services. Girls and women who have been raped during war should not be forced to continue unwanted pregnancies. For some victims of rape, undergoing a dangerous abortion is the only alternative to a life of shame, isolation and hardship, or even honour killings.

The rehabilitation of victims will not be possible unless they have access to comprehensive services. That includes access to health, justice and reparations. As long as survivors have little or nothing to gain from reporting sexual violence and coming forward, under-reporting will continue and impunity will prevail. Sexual violence, including threats of sexual violence, can have far-reaching effects, not only for those affected and their families but also for the wider communities and future prospects for peace and reconciliation.

Sustainable peace cannot be achieved without inclusive processes in which women's agency and contributions are fully recognized. We strongly commend the tireless work of civil society organizations in continuing to advance women's participation and bringing their voices from the ground to the fore of international peace and security. Promoting and supporting the broad women and peace and security agenda is a priority for the Nordic Governments. It is part of our joint efforts to foster gender equality and international peace and security. We are convinced that the two are closely linked.