

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber
Statement by Mr. Toriello, Permanent Mission of Sao Tome and Principe to the United Nations.

I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's presidency of the Council this month.

While there is much to say on this subject, for the sake of brevity I would like to start by pointing out that at the present stage of its history, the human race has enormously strengthened its physical, emotional and intellectual capacities. That is not a bad thing unless we give such strengths free rein to indulge in selfish exploitation and consumption and to focus solely on greed for self-enrichment in a way that enables a creed of individualism and predatory behaviour to dominate. This is an inborn tendency of humankind, from which spring our separations, divisions, oppositions, conflicts and so forth, resulting, inevitably, in wars.

To put a stop to such myopic, vicious selfdestructiveness, we need a strong and decisive force capable of inserting itself into this physical, emotional and intellectual contest. What we need today is to be energized by a new force, that of spirituality and conscience. It is no coincidence that many have called this the era of the awakening of our conscience, although clearly it is not something that will happen easily.

The reality is that this process is opposed by various powerful lobbies that exert their political, financial, economic and mass-communications influence to control Governments, directly or indirectly. But despite their opposition, the awakening of our collective conscience is still a reality.

Let us consider some major changes that have occurred in recent history — the rise of a culture of ecology; the growth of a preservationist culture aimed at protecting animal species at risk of extinction; an increase in volunteering activities and human generosity to others, rather than confining efforts to family members and people we know in closed circles or groups; personal inner growth, creating greater awareness and thus greater feelings of responsibility towards society at large; and, last but not least, the embrace of a wider, more holistic culture and vision of life. All of these are signs that the awakening of our conscience exists and is a genuine movement.

What about women, then? Why, in spite of such an awakening of our conscience, do women today still continue to see their rights abused, whether as citizens of the world or as people? It is shocking that in today's advanced world we still have to talk about the rights of women and children as if it were a special concession.

Rather than commenting on such an absurdity, repeating once again words that have been said over and over since time immemorial, or speculating intellectually on this issue, I would like to give it more constructive consideration.

Unfortunately, the system by which humankind operates is based on a structure of contradiction, so that whatever may be promoted on the one hand is nullified on the other. We do not take this factor of inherent contradiction into serious consideration, and because it is underestimated, this virus is free to worm its way into our human apparatus and to negatively affect the logic of our behaviour, to the point of affecting the social and intellectual frameworks on which we human beings have constructed the rules for our coexistence.

In fact, society in general has based its standards on corrupt values that while supposed to be genuine turn out not to be genuine at all. That is why our society stands for poverty, degradation, corruption, depravity, perversion, the abuse of power, conspiracy, genocide and thousands of other miseries. Since our whole social system has been based on unnatural, subverted values, it has become clear that the system on which we base our way of life is consequently vicious and crushing.

What is needed is a new leadership, based on holistic scientific and educational models that can encourage leaders to observe both themselves and their actions, something that is a precondition for establishing a culture where conscience dominates. In that regard, I should reiterate that it is vital that we find science-based

solutions to these issues, and thus that we ensure that scientific programmes are part of the educational and training systems whereby human beings can be taught according to a holistic vision of life that can overturn the sterile philosophies and frameworks that govern us.

As for the younger generation, rather than teaching them only how to earn money, they should be supported through good governance in understanding their innate creative attitude with a view to self-realization.

They can be taught natural ways of living, and thereby learn how emotions work and how to listen to each other. They can be taught how, in situations of conflict, to evoke calm in themselves and through their surroundings while practicing good communication methods.

Turning to the subject of women, research has shown that women have an advantage in negotiating because of two skills more often related to them. One is listening, which enables interest and awareness of the importance of truly listening to another person's point of view and processing it in the context of one's own point of view, instead of always thinking that one's point of view is the only one that is correct. The second quality and skill that women have that is helpful in the context of negotiations is that they tend to focus on cooperation more than on competition or control. Research has shown that a cooperation-oriented personality leads more often to situations of tolerance that, in my view, are eventually palliative and understanding that are crucial in reaching an agreement.

Another point is that women having a voice in peace and security fulfills a proposed focus area of the post-2015 development agenda concerning gender equality and women's empowerment. It also overlaps the focus area of sustainable society because when women feel empowered due to a peaceful situation, they can create a peaceful family setting, as they are crucial in the raising of children. That peaceful family context then sets the stage for a more peaceful and sustainable society, and therefore a more peaceful world.

It is a well-respected fact that women, who comprise more than half of the world's population, help to keep and protect peace and security through their strong family ties and work in the home, as well as through their influence on the work place and policy in their professional and diplomatic lives. Just like that of the men of honour throughout the world, women's influence is critical to making and preserving the global village of peace and security that every family and community needs and wants.

Fortunately, the United Nations — in its wisdom — has recognized the importance that women play in issues of peace and security by establishing UN-Women. While necessary, UN-Women can also be seen as the result of a distorted societal system and evidence that women have made concessions denying them certain rights.

That is why it is aberrant and offensive to see vicious men, hateful of all society — despite anything they may say — attacking women in public, especially the most defenceless, in the name of some cause or as an act of war, or aberrant pleasure in conflict. Violence against women is merely violence, without merit or cause. It is without justification and demonstrates the abandonment of hope. And it is not merely violence against women that is unacceptable and tragic, but sexual violence in particular. Rape, as is known, is not a crime of sex but of violence, not a show of power but of immeasurable weakness. It demonstrates the worst in men and in civilization. How is it that men in conflict condone such degradation not only to the women they harm, but ultimately to themselves and all humankind, through acts of sexual violence against women during wartime?

In the end, sexual violence against women in conflict is not a sign of the strength of one power over another — although militias may believe that due to reasons that may date back to generations and civilizations when women were the property of men and their subjugation by opposing forces reflected back on the parties to the conflict.

Our world now has evolved to where it is clear and well-known that those terrible acts stand alone and apart from war, expressing the rapists' inabilities, impotencies and wrongful thinking. Sexual violence against women during conflict only reinforces in the minds of the civilized world how wrong those guilty warriors are and how bereft of merit their positions must be to fall so low as to hurt the most vulnerable, the most innocent and perhaps the least able to defend themselves in those moments, against the senseless, barbaric acts.

As our consciousness continues to grow and the world evolves, we must take a united stand and say "never more" to violence against women. We must hope that those involved in conflict will one day understand why they go to war and why half of the world does not participate in their argument or in the spoils of war. Yet that half always plays a part in the healing and the return from conflict to peace and security once again.