

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

Statement by H.E. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations

Ambassador Susan Rice, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much, Madame President, for convening this important meeting. I appreciate your personal attention to the problem of sexual violence. This is a top priority for me and the United Nations system.

I thank all members of the Security Council for adopting Resolution 1960. You have put in place a vital building-block for holding perpetrators accountable. You have sent a resounding message to those who would violate both women's bodies and the law that impunity will not be tolerated.

But let us remember that even as we take this step here, catastrophe is unfolding for communities caught in the chaos of conflicts.

Armed elements are targeting civilians, raping women and men, and terrorizing entire populations.

Pre-meditated campaigns are being waged with the most sinister goals: to silence women leaders, to empty areas that are filled with rich minerals but poor people, to recruit others and perpetuate the cycle of abuse.

Sexual violence shatters lives, devastates countries and destroys hope. Victims who might have contributed to development are shunned. Girls who might have grown into great leaders cannot even attend school.

In many places, the threat is so pervasive that women cannot cultivate land, collect water, or get the fuel they need to cook and feed their families, for fear that they will be attacked in the process.

And often, the perpetrators seem to reserve particular cruelty for children, intentionally traumatizing boys and girls by forcing them to watch as their mothers are attacked, or by attacking the children themselves.

Earlier this year, this horrific reality played out in Walikale in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Hundreds of women were raped, as were girls, boys and men.

One young girl, just five years old, suffered such severe physical damage that she may never fully recover. We can only imagine the psychological trauma she now endures.

The victims may survive these attacks only to be subjected to another form of abuse. Sexual violence is one of the only crimes where the victims – and not the perpetrators – are left with stigma.

This is true not only in the DRC but in other countries around the world. Victims are shamed and marginalized. Their husbands reject them. Men and boys who are sexually attacked often suffer isolation and discrimination. Just when these individuals need support from their communities, it falls away.

Silencing the victims only benefits the perpetrators. It feeds impunity, which erodes faith in the justice system. And make no mistake: this is intentional, part of the very design. Attacks on women are attacks on peace itself. That is why we must do more to fight stigma, protect women's security and help the victims. They need services, and they deserve comprehensive reparations. This is critical to recovery for individuals and justice for society.

The United Nations and the international community can support national efforts – but we cannot supplant them. I call on leaders to join me in declaring, “Enough is enough!” We cannot permit the sexual violence that is used as a tactic of war to become a way of life.

The United Nations is working in conflict areas and troubled areas around the world to protect populations and combat impunity. We have seen that determined and concerted action can yield positive results.

In Walikale, MONUSCO peacekeepers, in a joint operation with Congolese Forces, arrested 'Lieutenant-Colonel' Mayele, who was allegedly responsible for commanding the mass rapes. But many perpetrators are still at large. MONUSCO and the UN system are helping the DRC authorities to investigate the crimes, protect witnesses and bring perpetrators to justice.

MONUSCO also launched a targeted operation to better protect civilians in the affected areas. As a result, a number of suspected human rights abusers were arrested and many internally displaced people were able to return to their homes.

Important steps have also been taken at the international level, including the recent arrests of FDLR leaders in France and Germany, and the work of the International Criminal Court on sexual violence crimes.

Today's resolution gives us sharper tools and sharper 'teeth' in the fight against sexual violence.

It gives me a mandate to list, in my reports on this question, parties who commit such acts.

It challenges the UN system to provide better information.

And it reaffirms the Council's commitment to adopting sanctions against perpetrators.

I will do everything possible to ensure that this resolution leads to real protection for populations at risk. My Special Representative is bringing the voices of women to your deliberations. I am grateful that she has been invited to brief you today and hope that she has many opportunities to do so again in the future. The Council's sustained political support for the deployment of the Team of Experts and protection of advisors in affected countries will be critical as we move ahead.

The entire United Nations system is mobilized under my UNiTE campaign to end violence against women. We are working to change attitudes across the world.

Excellencies, Distinguished Members of the Council,

Together, the United Nations, national governments and the international community can eliminate this menace and secure a better future for all people.

Thank you.