

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber
Statement by Mr. Seger, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations.

The Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) more than 13 years ago. Nevertheless, as my colleague from Liechtenstein has just recalled, sexual violence, especially rape, in countries in conflict and post-conflict situations, remains a sad reality. We cannot turn a blind eye on those human rights violations.

Switzerland therefore thanks your delegation, Madame President, for convening this debate, and the Secretary-General for his report (S/2014/181) on conflict-related sexual violence, which emphasizes the scope of the problem.

In the majority of the situations that have been observed, sexual violence is perpetrated as much by Government forces as by armed opposition groups. Our response to that must be firm: there shall be no impunity for the perpetrators of those crimes, and we will not rest until justice is done. In that regard, we would like to emphasize the recommendations of the Secretary-General on the need for countries to foster national ownership, leadership and responsibility and to strengthen the capacity of their civilian and military justice systems.

In that context, we would do well to recall the complementary role of the International Criminal Court when States are either unable or unwilling to render justice to the victims of acts of serious sexual violence insofar as they constitute crimes against humanity or war crimes.

We welcome the programmes for training and consciousness-raising as well as the monitoring measures such as those being pursued within the framework of human rights due diligence policy of the African Union Mission in Somalia. Regular reports on sexual and gender-based violence along with a zero-tolerance policy vis-à-vis the perpetrators of such crimes are indispensable.

Last March, the Human Rights Council in Geneva hosted a panel on sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which again brought to our attention the massive character of violence against women in that context. Armed conflicts and the weakness of State institutions, especially the judiciary and the security forces, are the primary destabilizing factors. The high incidence of sexual violence, especially rape, is a source of grave concern, all the more so because systematic impunity creates a context that encourages such violations.

Three months ago, just before the second Geneva Conference, 50 women from across Syria shared with us their priorities regarding the issue of sexual violence. They stressed that rendering justice was essential. Over a year ago, Switzerland, together with more than 60 other States, called on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. That demand is more timely now than ever, and in that regard we support France's initiative to draft a resolution to that end.

It is also crucial, in the early stages of a peace process, to adopt gender-sensitive policies and measures to protect women and girls from sexual exploitation, early marriage, human trafficking and rape. What other options do we have for action? While there may be no ready-made solutions, I would like to explore three areas that are addressed in the report.

We welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation to emphasize the decisive role of civil society, in particular women's organizations and community leaders, in the many efforts to eliminate sexual violence against women. We need to ensure that women's participation in peace negotiations and processes is conducted on an equal footing with men and that the resulting agreements take gender problems into account.

We share the Secretary-General's concerns about the fate of displaced populations, whose majority consists of women and girls. Their limited access to resources makes them that much more vulnerable to sexual

violence and sexual exploitation. We welcome the fact that his recommendations insist that prevention be an integral part of all country-specific resolutions by the Security Council. It is essential that prevention and protection measures be tailored to the context of displacement.

Finally, we share the Secretary-General's concern about the lack of official data on sexual violence. We need reliable data to effectively combat violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in situations of armed conflict and internal disturbances. With the goal of improving data collection, Switzerland supports the Harvard University Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, which focuses on the development of systematic methodological guidance that can be applied to monitoring, reporting and fact-finding efforts. We continue to believe that such instruments are essential for improving the prevention of crimes of sexual violence.

Finally, allow me to reiterate the importance of linking our efforts to protect and strengthen women's rights with our commitment to promote women's participation. Men, too, have everything to gain from such efforts. The development of a truly global society will be achieved only by insuring the equal participation of women and men in all aspects of the peacemaking, peacebuilding and reconstruction processes. Equal participation is a prerequisite for comprehensively addressing gender-based violence, as well as its causes and its consequences. Therefore, Switzerland would like to stress the importance of the latest resolutions on the issue, in particular resolution 2122 (2013). Furthermore, we call upon all actors to continue their efforts for the complete and cohesive implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

In conclusion, we commend Special Representative Zainab Bangura, who has played an outstanding role in drawing up joint strategies with Governments to combat sexual violence. Switzerland congratulates her for the progress made in the implementation of the frameworks and looks forward to hosting the next donor conference of the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict.