

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

Statement by Mr. Kandangha-Bariki, Permanent Mission of Togo to the United Nations.

Madam President, I want to thank your country, the Republic of Rwanda, for having organized today's debate on the issue of women and peace and security, as well as to welcome your presence here among us to lead this work. I would also like to welcome the Secretary-General, whose presence indicates the level of concern of the United Nations with regard to violence against women. We also welcome the presence of the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea. We congratulate Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General dealing with sexual violence committed in times of armed conflict, for her commitment to consolidating the progress made in the programme of action established by her predecessor. We reiterate to her our full support. Similarly, I would like to thank Ms. Keïta Diakité, who gave us a clear briefing on the situation with regard to women in West Africa, and particularly in Mali.

Sexual violence today has reached an intolerable level. In fact, women and girls are victims of all kinds of violence, particularly rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, pregnancy or forced sterilization, forced marriage, kidnappings and many other form of violence. The number of victims of sexual violence has increased, particularly in Africa with the appearance of new armed groups, such as the Mouvement du 23 Mars, the Mai-Mai Morgan, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda and the rebel Séléka coalition.

Sometimes, the Government forces of countries in conflict have themselves also committed the same violations. Rape has become a war strategy aimed at humiliating the enemy and establishing domination. The figures relating to violence against women and girls are considerable, particularly in the Central African Republic, where the rebels of the Séléka coalition and the Lords Resistance Army operate. In Mali, for example, we have also seen an increase in the number of crimes of sexual violence at a time when the northern region of the country was occupied by rebel groups. Several dozen cases of sexual violence have been reported.

We cannot fail to mention the situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where for several years women and children have been the favourite targets of armed groups. The atrocities committed are sometimes impossible to describe — simply horrific. Given those unimaginable atrocities, we must ask ourselves why this is happening. Looking for the underlying causes for the violence leads us to deduce that it is basically linked to economic and social considerations. Because of economic factors, armed groups have resorted to organized sexual violence so as to force the displacement of populations in order to pillage the natural resources of the regions where they operate. Likewise, they engage in violence against entire communities, often on the basis of race, ethnicity or religion, with the aim of establishing the domination of their own ethnic group in order to satisfy their political ambitions.

Another question that we ask ourselves pertains to the reasons for the persistence of these serious violations of human rights and the exponential increase in the number of victims. There are sociological reasons, first of all, which are linked to the refusal of women and girls to report the facts to the authorities because of their fear of reprisals, stigmatization or being punished or rejected by their spouses or their communities.

It appears to us, then, that one of the reasons has to do with the fact that the parties to the conflict do not respect their obligations under the relevant international legal instruments in the area of humanitarian law and human rights in times of armed conflict, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Protocol. It has also been seen that States parties to a number of conventions,

such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its optional protocol and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocol, lack the political will to implement the relevant provisions. Moreover, a number of Security Council resolutions and presidential statements are not being applied by States, especially not by the belligerents. They are simply ignored by the parties involved despite the fact that they have full responsibility to implement them.

Finally — and this is not an exhaustive list — the early-warning mechanisms established in peacekeeping operations show that they are limited in their ability to effectively protect women and girls in times of armed conflict. For all of those reasons, it is important that the measures already undertaken by the United Nations be strengthened in order to ensure respect for all the relevant instruments and resolutions through, among other things, the firm commitment on the part of States to shoulder their responsibilities and deal with those involved in serious violations of human rights.

Impunity cannot be the rule. In that regard, the United Nations must help States to establish appropriate cooperation mechanisms, particularly through bilateral or regional extradition agreements to deal with perpetrators. Effective mechanisms must also be put into place that take into account the needs of women who have been victims of sexual violence, who are often abandoned to their fate.

The international community, above all the United Nations, must become more involved on a legal level in the search for solutions to the problems raised by the commission of these horrific sexual crimes, particularly rape. That means that they must encourage recourse to national courts or international courts competent in that area to apprehend the perpetrators and thus fight against impunity. Unfortunately, in this area, the justice system itself has many problems for various reasons, including the fact that the judicial system is often slow and not independent. The international investigation commissions do not always have sufficient funds to adequately establish the facts. There is also a lack of cooperation between States and international jurisdictions with regard to the implementation of the international arrest warrants and other decisions.

Despite all of those difficulties and obstacles, we can say that courageous action has been carried out by the United Nations, particularly by UN-Women, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and a number of international and non-governmental organizations. Togo commends all of those efforts undertaken to fight against this scourge and welcomes the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (S/2013/149).

Togo also believes that the international community should become mobilized to an even greater extent to put an end to the scourge, as it has done in the case of the fight against major diseases. In that regard, several measures should be taken.

First, we should seek to promote a change in the sociocultural behaviour of men towards women. We should eradicate preconceptions, customs and traditions and all other practices based on the idea that women are inferior, which have led to their being used as objects during periods of armed conflict.

Secondly, we should encourage all members of society, particularly men and boys, to actively contribute to the prevention of all forms of violence during times of peace.

Thirdly, we should promote or regularly conduct, at all levels, campaigns and programmes to increase the awareness and understanding among the public at large of the different forms and consequences of the various forms of violence against women, especially sexual violence, which has serious consequences for women, society and development.

Fourthly, we should promote cooperation between international jurisdictions and national courts in order to track down, arrest and bring to justice the perpetrators of violence in order to put an end to the culture of impunity.