

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

Statement by Sir Mark Lyall Grant, Permanent Mission of United Kingdom to the United Nations.

I thank you, Madam President, for holding this debate today and for coming to New York to give added impetus to this important issue. The huge number of those wanting to speak in this debate is a visible demonstration of its importance and topicality. I join others in thanking the Secretary-General and his Special Representative Zainab Hawa Bangura for their valuable briefings today. I also thank Ms. Keïta Diakité for her moving words on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.

The United Kingdom is deeply committed to addressing sexual violence in conflict, which is one of the most persistent and neglected injustices in the world today. Last week, the Group of Eight (G-8) Foreign Ministers, under the presidency of the United Kingdom, agreed a historic declaration on preventing sexual violence in conflict. They pledged to work together and with others in a concerted and comprehensive campaign to address that crime. The G-8 declared for the first time that rape and serious sexual violence in conflict were grave breaches of the Geneva Convention, as well as being war crimes. That decision recognizes our responsibility to actively search for, prosecute or hand over for trial anyone accused of those crimes, regardless of nationality, wherever they are in the world.

Today's debate is an opportunity to reinforce that message and to send a strong, shared message that there is no safe haven for perpetrators of rape and sexual violence. The statements we have heard thus far in this debate are very encouraging on that point.

The United Kingdom welcomes the Secretary-General's timely report (S/2013/149). A key objective of the United Kingdom's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative is to strengthen United Nations and other international efforts to eradicate that scourge.

We wholeheartedly support the work and mandate of Ms. Bangura, especially her efforts to build coherence and coordination in the United Nations response and her focus on national ownership and responsibility. The report provides an important opportunity to assess progress and to consider what more needs to be done. It is clear that there is a huge amount still to be done.

I would like to highlight the following three critical areas that we must address.

First, the United Kingdom would like to commend the Secretary-General for recommending that all country resolutions and mandate renewals for United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions systematically address sexual violence and include the specific language of resolution 1960 (2010). We agree that peacekeeping mandates should include language on the cessation of sexual violence, on dialogue with parties to conflict to seek protection commitments and on the deployment of women protection advisors, and that we should ensure, in particular, that they are funded from peacekeeping mission budgets. We must be rigorous and consistent in our approach on this issue.

Secondly, we recognize that a focus on the difficult issues surrounding security sector and justice reform is critical: providing training for national security forces; ensuring the principles of no amnesty for perpetrators of grave human rights violations, including sexual violence; and ensuring that the security sector is accessible and responsive to all. In the justice sector, work to train the police, magistrates and judges and more training for female lawyers will result in more effective investigations and prosecutions. That is also very welcome.

Thirdly, we welcome calls to ensure that the Security Council, mediators, envoys and Member States

actively engage in dialogue with parties to conflict on conflict-related sexual violence. That is central to ensuring that the issue of sexual violence as a method or tactic of conflict is explicitly recognized in subsequent peace processes and ceasefire agreements. As my Foreign Secretary said on 11 April, we need such commitments to end the treatment of rape and sexual violence as a secondary issue and to put women and women's rights front and centre in conflict resolution.

Finally, as the representatives of China and Luxembourg, among others, have highlighted, let us not forget that women's full and equal participation is fundamental to combating sexual violence. Women must not be seen merely as passive victims, but as active participants who are central to all efforts to combat that horrific phenomenon.

Let me end as I began, by thanking you, Madam, for holding this debate and reinforcing the Council's continued commitment to tackling this issue. As you know, my Foreign Secretary is personally committed to this issue. Together, we absolutely must deliver on our promises to those devastated by those appalling and life-shattering crimes, wherever they take place. A strong resolution that demonstrates this shared commitment is both timely and critical, and we intend to use a further debate in June, during our presidency of the Council, to keep attention focused on the need to end these crimes.