

**Security Council**

Seventy-third year

8234th meeting
Monday, 16 April 2018, 10 a.m.
New York*Provisional***Statement by the Representative of Austria, Mr. Kickert:**

Austria aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends on Women, Peace and Security and the Human Security Network.

We would like to thank Peru for convening this open debate and the briefers for their reports. Understanding the impact of armed conflict on women and girls is central to effectively address sexual violence, prevent its occurrence and protect those at risk. We will highlight four points in the context of this debate.

My first point concerns protecting minorities. Persons belonging to minorities encounter a high risk as targets of violence. That was exemplified to us today by the testimony of Ms. Razia Sultana from the Rohingya community of Myanmar. Equally appalling is the fact that Da'esh continues to traffic Iraqi Yazidi women and girls into and across Syria as part of its campaign targeting minorities. The patterns of violence against women and girls belonging to minorities are embedded in underlying structural conditions, including inequality, gender-based discrimination and neglect for the rights of persons belonging to minorities. As the sponsor of the resolutions on the rights of persons belonging to minorities at the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, Austria stresses the obligation of States to protect minorities from violence and underlines the necessity of empowering women and girls belonging to minorities who are often particularly vulnerable. As Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten stated today, empowerment is a main building block for protection. We also emphasize the relevance of early-warning and awareness-raising measures to tackle problems regarding the situations of minorities, including through the relevant United Nations mechanisms and bodies, as well as regional organizations.

My second point involves countering impunity. We must do much more to combat and prevent sexual violence directed against women. Women and girls are kidnapped, held captive as sex slaves and traded like goods or animals. The crimes committed against them amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those responsible simply have to be brought to justice. Austria wants to see all perpetrators, including Da'esh and Boko Haram fighters, held accountable for their repulsive acts of violence against women and girls. As Special Representative Patten said today, only by truly fighting impunity will we achieve a deterrence effect. In order to help establish accountability, Austria has supported and contributed financially to the creation of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to

Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We also anticipate that the investigative team to support domestic efforts to hold Da'esh accountable by collecting evidence in Iraq will soon generate actionable results.

The third point concerns preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers. Reports of sexual exploitation and abuse by both military and civilian personnel in United Nations peacekeeping missions in recent years have increasingly tainted the reputation of the United Nations and undermined its credibility. Austria condemns such behaviour and welcomes the focus of the Secretary-General on that important issue and his initiatives in that regard. Austria will sign the Secretary-General's compact on the elimination of sexual exploitation. We also intend to include this subject in the curriculum of the United Nations-certified course on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The course is held on a regular basis at the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Stadtschlaining and is attended by senior staff in United Nations peacekeeping from around the world. The fourth point involves reintegrating survivors. Sexual violence in conflict has a significantly detrimental impact on individuals and communities. In all too many settings, victims and their children are stigmatized, discriminated against and rejected by their communities. An example of determined efforts to support the reintegration of survivors of sexual violence is the case of northern Uganda, where during the conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army many serious crimes, including various forms of sexual and gender-based violence, were committed. Since 2008, the Austrian Development Agency, together with the International Center for Transitional Justice, has implemented four consecutive projects with a focus on supporting ongoing work on transitional justice in Uganda, with the aim of reintegrating victims into their communities.

Against the background of my own professional experience, I also note the case of the conflict-related sexual violence that took place in Kosovo in the late 1990s, which is not mentioned in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250). It is important that every woman and girl who has experienced sexual violence is recognized, as such recognition may constitute the first step in a very difficult healing process to overcome the inconceivable traumas suffered.

Violence directed against women and girls has to be eradicated in all its forms. Sexual violence in conflict builds upon the structural violence and discrimination against women and girls, which is already present in peacetime. Against that backdrop, Austria recently launched a campaign, with a fund of €1 million, to support activities that oppose female genital mutilation and its effects.

Rest assured that we will continue our work to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women across the board, with a special focus on women and peace and security