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Statement by the Representative of Bolivia, Ms. Cardona Moscoso

Conflict-related sexual violence involves a series of crimes against humanity that have devastating and irreversible consequences for its victims. The Security Council must address the issue on a more regular basis, which is why we thank the presidency of Peru for its initiative in convening this open debate. We would also like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for her leadership in making this issue more visible. Moreover, we thank Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and Ms. Razia Sultana for their briefings.

Bolivia believes that conflict-related sexual violence is one of the most heinous acts against humanity because its emotional and physical consequences continue to affect its survivors long after the conflicts end. The international community must band together to tackle this problem and coordinate its efforts to implement measures at the national, regional and international levels.

Over the past 18 years, the Security Council has been developing a series of resolutions that attempt to provide a comprehensive response to sexual violence in conflict, which indubitably poses a serious threat to international security and a real impediment to the achievement of peace in countries that are victims of armed confrontation.

Despite those resolutions, however, sexual violence in conflict continues to be a cruel reality in the daily lives of millions of people. It is imperative that the Security Council be resolute in the implementation of its resolutions on combating sexual violence in conflict by promoting accountability and implementing the zero-tolerance policy. We believe that the Secretary-General's suggestions in his recent report (S/2018/250) are correct, especially with regard to including sexual violence in the designation criteria for sanctions and in ensuring that the sanctions committees can access information from an expert on gender and conflict-related sexual violence.

Although sexual violence in conflict knows no gender, it mostly affects women and girls, who are subjected to rape, sexual slavery, prostitution, forced marriage and sterilization, trafficking in persons and other forms of violence with terrible consequences for the physical and psychological well-being of the victims. Very often, instead of receiving protection and assistance, they are marginalized and rejected in their own communities.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and terrorism is most alarming. In that regard, the international community must work together to support national initiatives geared towards the social reintegration of survivors and their children so that they can fully enjoy their rights.

Likewise, the increasing risk of sexual violence in refugee camps and during displacement is another challenge with which the international community must grapple. Insecurity during displacement, lack of access to basic services for refugees and the prolongation of conflicts that impede a safe return are all difficult conditions that millions of people now experience. An example is the situation on the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

We highlight Bangladesh's goodwill in providing refuge to the Rohingya people, and we encourage Myanmar to continue working with the United Nations to ensure the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the displaced persons. We believe that women's empowerment as a preventive measure, access to justice and accountability are fundamental elements in the fight against sexual violence.

However, it is clear that, in order to promote such measures, we must first address the root causes of conflict, reduce structural inequalities, combat extreme poverty and eradicate the discrimination that patriarchal systems have left entrenched in society and that prevent women from enjoying unhindered personal development and access to justice. Prevention is a very important tool that the Secretary-General has been promoting over the past year.

Increasing the cooperation between the United Nations and civil society is essential for prevention, in order to access more specific information that will enable us to carry out more reliable analyses of the situation. It is key to promote the participation of women in peace, security and development processes, and to include in the agreements specific content on the inclusion of women, the fight against sexual violence and the elimination of impunity.

The political empowerment of women should be promoted by States through concrete measures that transform the conditions of abuse and discrimination in which women, minorities and rural populations live. Afghanistan has provided a good example of legal and constitutional transformation for women in its work to implement its national action plan for Afghan women, which has proved to be an encouraging development, despite the fact that major challenges remain.

Similarly, close cooperation with regional organizations is also of the utmost importance. Last year, the Deputy Secretary-General visited Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was very significant for the joint work of the United Nations and the African Union. That type of approach is very important for the implementation of the gender, peace and security programme on the African continent, as well as for the strengthening of other existing mechanisms. We also highlight the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, which was set up through a peace agreement led by the African Union, with technical support from the United Nations. Despite the time it is taking to implement, it is a collaborative initiative that we should continue to encourage. That said, we believe that we have good tools for continuing our struggle against sexual violence. Many challenges lie ahead,

and we must therefore strengthen the commitment of the Security Council and the United Nations system in general..