

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 24th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. António, Permanent Observer of African Union to the United Nations.

Let me begin by joining preceding speakers in congratulating the presidency for the United Kingdom's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would like to express the African Union's (AU) deep appreciation for the holding of this open debate on a topic of great importance, as illustrated by the overwhelming number of participants.

This debate bears eloquent testimony to the United Kingdom's commitment and efforts towards the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions at the highest political level. The adoption, under the United Kingdom's leadership of the Group of Eight Summit, held in London on 11 April, of the declaration on preventing sexual violence in conflict further reflects that commitment.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his personal commitment and engagement in giving this issue the attention it deserves. I would also like to thank Ms. Bangura for her leadership in representing the African continent. We want her to know how proud we are of the work she is doing on this important issue.

The issue of sexual violence in conflict implies a collective moral obligation and provokes a sense of urgency, given the ongoing escalation of this crime and its devastating effects on its innocent victims — women and girls, men and boys. The African Union's efforts have focused on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) in conjunction with the gender policy adopted by the African Union in 2009. Furthermore, the AU's road map for the African Peace and Security Architecture for the period 2011-2013 devotes an entire section to the topic of women and peace and security. The AU Peace and Security Department has taken concrete steps to mainstream gender into its work at the institutional, operational and programmatic levels. The inclusion of gender experts as part of post-conflict needs- assessment missions undertaken by the Peace and Security Reconstruction Department is a step forward in formulating efficient post-conflict reconstruction programmes.

Similarly, efforts have also been made within AU peace support operations to address the different needs of men and women as peacekeepers, while recognizing that much more must be done at the cultural and policy levels to address gender differences in such operations. In 2011, as part of its efforts to raise awareness in the Peace and Security Council on the situation of women and children in Africa, the AU Panel of the Wise commissioned a report on mitigating the vulnerabilities of women and children in armed conflicts in 2011. The report highlights how rape and sexual and gender-based violence have reached pandemic proportions during conflicts. Within its mandate, the Peace and Security Department has a central role to play in developing and implementing strategies on preventing and responding to sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

It was in that context that the African Union Peace and Security Council held a meeting on 28 March 2011 on the theme of women and children and other vulnerable groups in armed conflict, with the participation, among others, of the then United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Building on that meeting, given the priority accorded this issue by the leadership of the African Union Commission, efforts are under way to appoint an AU special representative on sexual violence in conflict.

The African Union Commission has been encouraged by its continued strong collaboration with the United Nations through the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, with a view to signing a cooperation framework in the near future. We are convinced

that the envisaged cooperation framework will go a long way to enhancing cooperation and coordination between the African Union Commission and the United Nations as they address conflict-related sexual violence.