

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

Statement by Mr. Al-Thani, Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations.

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and to thank the United Kingdom delegation, especially His Excellency Mr. William Hague, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, for presiding over this meeting. It is an important opportunity to strengthen the Council's efforts on sexual violence in conflict situations, and to highlight the challenges faced by States in conflict and post-conflict situations in addressing that crime.

I also thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict for their valuable briefings and their eagerness to participate in the meeting.

The latest report of the Secretary-General, entitled "Sexual violence in conflict" (S/2013/149), contains many recommendations and significant information. In the report, he stresses that the lack of adequate national capacity and expertise to investigate and prosecute acts of sexual violence has remained one of the main impediments to ensuring accountability for related crimes. He also indicates that Member States bear the primary legal and moral responsibility for preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence, and reiterates the need for national ownership, leadership and responsibility in that context.

We cannot consider the issue of women, peace and security without addressing the root causes of their suffering and insecurity. Consequently, improving women's protection is not merely a humanitarian task, but one that requires focused efforts in several areas — first and foremost, the enforcement of the laws necessary to protect them in armed conflict, without discrimination or selectivity, and calling upon all parties to the conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence during the conflict.

In that context, I reiterate the importance of ensuring access to health care, social support services and justice for victims of sexual violence in conflict-affected areas. I also note the importance of strengthening cooperation among humanitarian actors, exchanging experiences and lessons learned, as well as initiatives to prevent sexual violence in conflict.

It is sad that today, even as we speak, many people in various countries of the world are being subjected to acts of sexual violence. In those countries, ongoing conflict has led to the displacement of populations and to increased security risks faced by refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), including the risk of sexual violence. It is clear that our Arab region is not immune to the dangers posed by armed conflict and its devastating effects on civilians, irrespective of their social group or whether they are men, women or children.

We are deeply concerned by acts of violence that include kidnapping, rape and sexual violence in the context of armed conflict. Women bear the brunt of such acts, which constitute human rights violations. In our Arab region, as one of the most prominent examples of this phenomenon is that women in the sisterly country of Syria, who have not been spared by the brutal onslaught being waged against the Syrian people by their own regime, which has adopted a repressive military solution in addressing the demands of the people.

In that context, women constitute the majority of Syrian IDPs and refugees. The regime's officials, security apparatus, loyalists and thugs subject them to discrimination, physical and sexual assault, violations of their right to privacy, arbitrary arrest and detention as a means of forcing their male

relatives to turn themselves in. Such acts amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity and their perpetrators must be held accountable. The Secretary-General stresses in his report that in Syria, such acts constitute the main reasons why women and girls have fled conflict-affected cities, including the high level of insecurity and access constraints.

I reiterate the State of Qatar's support for all efforts aimed at strengthening the rule of law and preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict situations. I also stress the importance of continuing to fight the impunity that hampers access by victims of such crimes to justice, security and safety. To be sure, the prosecution and trial of the perpetrators of sexual violence are key steps contributing to strengthened efforts to prevent sexual violence and protect women and girls.

In conclusion, the ongoing global interest in the role of women in peace and security, and the improvement we are witnessing in their participation in policy efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts will have real and positive impacts on peace and security and will shape the typical disastrous outcomes in various conflict regions throughout the world.