

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

Statement by Mr. Gasana, Permanent Mission of Rwanda to the United Nations.

Let me join others in thanking you, The Right Honourable William Hague, United Kingdom Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and President of the Security Council, for convening this open debate. I would also like to convey my sincere gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Zainab Bangura, for their respective statements. In addition, please allow me to acknowledge the presence here today of the Ministers of Guatemala, France, Morocco, Sweden, Ecuador and Lithuania, as well as that of our special guests, namely, Ms. Jane Adong Anywar, from the non-governmental organization Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, and Ms. Angelina Jolie, Special Envoy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

In recent months, the Security Council has quite rightly directed considerable energy to the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. Today's open debate on sexual violence in conflict follows a similar open debate under Rwanda's presidency in April (see S/PV.6948), and one month after the Arria Formula meeting on gender advisers in peacekeeping missions, organized by Australia and Guatemala. Although we can never do enough to protect women and girls — in families, in villages, across communities and at national and international levels — we hope that debates such as these, supported by the eager participation of many States Members of the United Nations, will translate into concrete action, and that by taking action to protect women and girls from violence their key role in our respective societies will be promoted.

The commitment of the United Kingdom to raise awareness on war-zone rape and on the need to bring perpetrators to justice is commendable. In London in May 2012, you, Secretary Hague, launched a campaign in London to prevent rape and sexual violence in conflict zones. Last March, you visited our region: first Rwanda, where you paid tribute to the victims of the genocide perpetrated against Tutsis, and discussed lasting peace in the region. Then you visited the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where sexual and gender-based violence, tragically, remain prevalent, and reached out in order to hear from the victims of such violence. Last April, with your leadership, the Foreign Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Group of Eight adopted a declaration on the prevention of sexual violence in conflict, which urged every State to bring the perpetrators to justice. Rwanda commends your leadership on the issue, Sir, and stands firmly beside you as we pursue a meaningful international response.

During the 1994 genocide perpetrated against Tutsis, women and girls were forced to endure inhuman and degrading atrocities. That memory and history inspire Rwanda in our unyielding and heartfelt commitment to eradicate sexual violence as a weapon of war and genocide. Tens of thousands of Rwandan women and young girls were raped and left for dead during the months of April to July 1994. Among those who survived, many were infected with incurable diseases, some were made pregnant, and many suffered the humiliation of having been abused in front of their families. It is deeply regrettable that many of those who committed those atrocities in Rwanda continue such practices in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today, with total impunity.

We take this opportunity to call upon all Member States, particularly those within the region, to fully implement resolution 1804 (2008) and to refrain from providing any military, financial or political support to the cynically called Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda.

Rwanda has been able to achieve meaningful reconciliation within our borders only by insisting on justice and fighting impunity. Rwandans have come to understand first-hand the importance of

strengthening internal justice mechanisms and building institutions that enhance accessibility to justice. Fighting against impunity must be the primary responsibility of States. The international community, including the United Nations, should support national jurisdictions, by helping to build capacity where gaps exist and by providing guidance and direction drawn from a rich well of best practices in the field, including those gleaned from post-conflict societies such as Rwanda's.

For Rwanda's part, we have adopted a range of policies to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. One of the foremost priorities is to protect and rehabilitate the dignity of victims. That figures prominently in our national action plan on the implementation of the resolution 1325 (2000). To that end, sexual and gender-based violence centres were established at the community level throughout the country, and a 2009 law on the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence includes penalties and substantive mechanisms to empower police to deal with such crimes.

In a recent trip to our region, the Secretary- General was joined by the President of the World Bank to launch a centre of excellence for the fight against violence against women and children. This is a best- practice one-stop centre and a place where all the relevant Government and non-Government support services — health, justice and police, counselling and welfare — converge to provide support for victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Such centres offer a non-threatening environment that allows victims to take full advantage of their legal rights, as well as to begin the process of healing. As noted by the Secretary- General during his visit, "Rwanda's strong political commitment to prevent and combat violence against women and children" is reflected in all spheres of the Government.

The Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) considers the prevention and mitigation of sexual violence against women and girls as a key imperative across all its deployments. The RDF gender desk devises training programmes to raise awareness of sexual and gender- based violence. Those programmes have been fully incorporated into the core curriculums of Rwanda's military academies and training institutions. That is considered integral to the preparation of all RDF battalions bound for peacekeeping missions abroad. Moreover, Rwanda is among the leading contributors of female police and correctional officers to United Nations peace-support and peacekeeping missions, where they combat and raise awareness about violence against women and serve as advisers on gender-based violence, sharing best practices with officers and local authorities.

For those reasons, we support the full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and resolution 1960 (2010), which emphasize that all peacekeeping mandates incorporate provisions that specifically identify steps to address sexual violence, and that should include the clear identification of women's protection advisers alongside gender advisers and human rights protection units.

The legal and institutional framework against sexual and gender-based violence has been strengthened over time. However, as the recent report of the Secretary- General indicates (S/2013/335), sexual violence remains prevalent in armed conflict, particularly on the African continent. Ultimately, it is self-evident that the most effective means to eradicate sexual violence in conflict zones is to bring those conflicts to an end. Any comprehensive global response to the problem must acknowledge that sexual violence, while vile and unacceptable under any circumstances, is the by- product of war. Therefore, any meaningful solution must address the root causes of conflict. Furthermore, any global approach must include more effective monitoring of the commitments made by Member States to prevent sexual violence where possible and address its consequences where necessary.

Let me conclude by once again thanking non-governmental organizations, civil society and other non-State actors for their support to the cause of women and girls and for their contribution to justice against perpetrators of sexual and gender- based violence. We hope and trust that their

actions, combined with a genuine commitment by States as well as by the international community, will hasten the day when women, girls and children are no longer brutally targeted in conflicts that they did not at all create.