

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

Statement by Ms. Bangura, the Special Representative of the Secretary General the United Nations.

I wish to thank the Secretary- General for his statement. His personal commitment to this cause ensures that sexual violence in conflict remain a critical concern for the entire United Nations system, and challenges us to work in unison.

I would like to thank the Government of the United Kingdom, especially Foreign Secretary William Hague, for hosting this open debate on sexual violence in conflict and for being among the leading torch-bearers and champions for this agenda.

I also wish to thank Jane Adong Anywar for representing the essential work undertaken by civil society groups, which are on the front line of this battle every day. I also thank Angelina Jolie for being here today and standing in solidarity. Her voice is a light in the darkness for many survivors.

Twenty years ago, the United Nations provided irrefutable evidence that the widespread and systematic rape of women, girls and men was being perpetrated in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. That led to unprecedented advances in international jurisprudence — the recognition of rape as a war crime and crime against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunals established for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Two weeks ago, I visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, where an estimated 50,000 women were targeted with rape and other forms of sexual violence during four years of conflict. But 20 years after peace was re-established, impunity for those crimes still reigns. There have been only a handful of prosecutions. While the perpetrators have enjoyed the fruits of peace and have been free to rebuild their lives, their victims continue to work in the shadows and in shame, unable to lay the past to rest and to move forward.

In their day-to-day lives, survivors of sexual violence are forced to face the men who raped them — in banks, in supermarkets and at the schools of their children, children whose “inheritance” is the stigma of sexual violence, many of whom are offspring born of rape. Those women told me that they could look forward to the future when that future continued to be determined by many of the very people who had destroyed their lives.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the guns may have fallen silent 20 years ago, but for the survivors of sexual violence the war has not ended. Their battle continues as they struggle with physical and psychological injuries, stigma and isolation, poverty and destitution. That is what I have witnessed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in many other countries devastated by war. Conflict- related sexual violence, when left unaddressed by justice and reparations, can have a profound impact on the sustainability of peace and the prospects for developments.

That is why the theme of today’s debate — combating impunity for sexual violence — is of the utmost relevance and urgency. By focusing on impunity, we make a more concerted effort to put the spotlight on the perpetrators, that is, on those who commit, or command, or condone sexual violence in conflicts. In so doing, we begin to re-direct the stigma and the consequences of sexual violence from the survivors to the perpetrators.

Over the course of five years, we have seen significant progress at the political level, advances led largely by the Security Council. Its engagement has shattered an enduring myth that has paralysed

action for too long, namely, that sexual violence is culturally or socially unspeakable, that it is an inevitable by-product of war for which little can be done, or that it does not merit such singular focus because in the hierarchy of human rights violations sexual violence is a lesser evil.

To the contrary, the resolutions of the Security Council affirm that this crime, when committed systematically and used as a tool of war, is a fundamental threat to the maintenance of international peace and security, and as such requires an operational, security and justice response. That paradigm shift requires a new approach to attack the scourge of war-time rape. Among other things, it compels us to expand the circle of stakeholders beyond the traditional gender experts, to also engage uniformed peacekeepers, mediators, ceasefire monitors, war-crime prosecutors and the full range of civilian-protection and justice-sector actors.

The draft resolution to be adopted by the Council today consolidates that approach. It reinforces the robust conceptual framework, the infrastructure and the elements of the compliance regime established by resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010) — a compliance regime based on reliable and timely information and analysis, and the political, strategic and tactical-level actions that must be taken on the basis of such information. In its scope, operational detail and clarity, the draft resolution encapsulates the evolution of our understanding of conflict-related sexual violence and what it takes to prevent it. As such it, outlines a comprehensive operational approach to tackle the problem.

The draft resolution places emphasis on a more consistent and rigorous investigation and prosecution of sexual violence crimes as a central aspect of deterrence and, ultimately, prevention. Essentially, we must raise the cost and consequences for those who commit such crimes. The draft resolution also stresses that considerations of sexual violence must be explicitly and consistently reflected in peace processes, ceasefires and peace agreements. That gives fundamental recognition to the principle that there can be no viable peace and security when the security of women is not at the heart of peacemaking.

The draft resolution emphasizes that sexual violence must be specifically reflected in other critical peace and security processes and arrangements, such as security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. That includes ensuring that those who commit, command or condone sexual violence be vetted and excluded from positions of influence and power.

The draft resolution emphasizes the need for comprehensive and multidimensional strategies for us to meet our obligations to the survivors of sexual violence — the critical health, psychosocial, legal and other interventions that they must have to rebuild their lives.

Crucially, the draft resolution calls on all parties to a conflict to make specific commitments to prevent sexual violence, and challenges the United Nations to engage with parties to illicit such commitments. Such an engagement-based approach has already begun to yield results, with several formal agreements between the United Nations and affected countries to address conflict-related sexual violence.

The United Nations Team of Experts plays an important role in that regard, serving as a ready resource for national authorities in their efforts to strengthen the rule-of-law response to sexual violence. That is proving to be an innovative and valuable tool for Governments, and should be further reinforced. In the coming months, we also hope to accelerate the deployment of women's protection advisers to the relevant United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions.

The women's protection advisers are a new cadre of specialists combining political and security expertise, human rights monitoring and gender analysis. Their principal role is to catalyse the

implementation of the key operational aspects of the Council's resolutions on sexual violence in conflict.

Since taking office, in September 2012, I have placed particular emphasis on engaging national stakeholders in order to foster national ownership, leadership and responsibility. My experience to date reinforces my belief that it is at the country level that will and resolve are most urgently required to implement national legislation, strengthen institutions for the prosecution of crimes of sexual violence and to enhance capacity to care for survivors.

I cannot overemphasize that the commitment of the United Nations system, however great it may be, can never substitute for the political will and action of national actors. The United Nations, through the United Nations Action Network of 13 entities, stands ready to support local efforts. But national actors must lead from the front, and the international community must support their efforts with adequate resources and technical assistance.

Today it is still largely cost-free to rape a woman, child or man in conflict. Sexual violence has been used throughout the ages precisely because it is such a cheap and devastating weapon. But for the first time in history, we can reverse that reality. It will require leadership and political courage, and a relentless determination to match the cold, calculating brutality of those who would rape the innocent for military or political gain.

I believe that we have the collective will, and increasingly the tools, to make it an unsustainable liability for parties to use sexual violence as a weapon of war. The resolve of the Council and the international community as a whole has set us firmly on the path of accountability and prevention. We must stay the course until we achieve the critical mass of action that will turn the tide on history's oldest and least condemned crime.