

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict
16th-17th December 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Mr. Barbalić, Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United Nations

I would like to thank you, Madam President, for having organized this important debate. We appreciate the significance that the United States attaches to the issue at hand and commend your personal tireless efforts and engagement. Our appreciation also goes to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Special Representative Wallström, Under-Secretary-General Le Roy and Military Adviser Gaye for their comprehensive briefings.

At the outset, allow me to express our gratitude for the information provided by Special Representative Wallström relating to Bosnia and Herzegovina. We needed to hear those words. The only way to move forward is to face the truth and deal with it. And a great deal of institutional and individual effort has been committed and invested to that end in Bosnia. There are, however, a number of obstacles that are occasionally still encountered.

The examples presented prove how difficult and delicate the issue under discussion today is, and how far post-conflict societies have to go to fully engage and deal with their pasts. However, I wish to ensure you of our firm commitment to do everything to reach justice. We will continue that longstanding struggle and prove that justice must be satisfied for the sake of both the past and the future.

Bosnia and Herzegovina attaches the utmost importance to confronting the grave issue of sexual violence and is particularly encouraged by the commitment of the Security Council to keep the matter on its agenda. That commitment was unequivocally demonstrated by the adoption of resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1894 (2009), which have paved the way for concrete action aimed at preventing sexual violence. The appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence and the creation of UN Women were significant steps towards ensuring the coherence of United Nations activities. We also welcome cooperation between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

In addition, we must use this opportunity to underscore the responsibilities of States and parties to conflict to observe and uphold their international obligations and respect international humanitarian law, which grants special protection to women and children. We are of the opinion that United Nations bodies and donors should extend more support to national Governments in building capacities and developing gender-sensitive programmes for survivors of sexual violence, with services ranging from access to justice to provision of psychological care. The role of non-governmental organizations is particularly relevant in this process.

The United Nations and the international community have demonstrated their firm commitment and political will to prevent sexual violence against women, combat impunity and enforce accountability. On the other hand, it is equally crucial that national authorities make every effort to ensure that perpetrators of sexual crimes be brought to justice and not go unpunished. In that context, international assistance is of vital importance as post-conflict countries' rebuild their justice systems and prosecute the perpetrators of sexual violence.

We reiterate the need for adequate capabilities and clear and appropriate guidelines to enable peacekeeping missions to carry out their mandated tasks, including preventing and responding to sexual violence. Recruiting women in civil, military and police components of peacekeeping missions can encourage local women to report incidents of sexual violence. Deployment of a greater number of female police and military personnel with adequate training in gender-based violence is vital for better addressing issues related to sexual violence on the ground. It can also contribute to establishing better communication with local communities.

Furthermore, we consider it crucial that the Security Council continue the practice of including, where applicable, designation criteria pertaining to acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence when adopting or renewing targeted sanctions pursuant to resolution 1888 (2009). We also strongly encourage the flow of information about sexual violence between United Nations peacekeeping missions or other United Nations missions or bodies and the corresponding Security Council sanctions committees.

Bosnia and Herzegovina supports the establishment of arrangements for monitoring, analyzing and reporting sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Such a mechanism is necessary for data collection so that the use of systematic sexual violence in conflict situations on the Council's agenda can be tracked. In order to halt incidents of sexual violence, those who are credibly suspected of being responsible for patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence should be listed in the annexes of the reports. Listing and de-listing of persons responsible for those horrendous acts must be performed according to verifiable data and clear benchmarks. We would also like to commend the delegation of the United States of America for their efforts in drafting resolution 1960 (2010), adopted today. We are convinced that this resolution will contribute towards more effective monitoring, reporting and analysis of data on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

Finally, we would like to point out that the international community has taken noteworthy steps, including the adoption of relevant resolutions, to tackle the issue of sexual violence. But, more importantly, the time has come to start converting commitments and promises into real actions on the ground to prevent violence, protect individuals, punish perpetrators and provide redress to victims. Bosnia and Herzegovina stands ready to contribute to those efforts.