

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

Statement by H.E. Mr. Meron Reuben, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations

I thank you, Madame President, for your delegation's leadership in holding this very important debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Under-Secretary-General Le Roy, Special Representative Wallström and Military Adviser Gaye for their valuable briefings.

In the 10 years since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), we have seen some positive steps to prevent sexual violence in conflict. Unfortunately, overall progress is slow. Israel joined the list of sponsors of resolution 1960 (2010), recognizing the urgent need for collective action on this pressing issue. As a co-sponsor of the previous resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009), Israel remains deeply committed to their full implementation. We welcome the increased deployment of gender advisers, the routine inclusion of provisions in peacekeeping mandates that protect women and girls from sexual violence, and the growing awareness of the need to include women in any peacemaking process.

Israel welcomes the Secretary-General's report of 24 November (S/2010/604) and commends him for his efforts and leadership on this issue. The report documents how widespread acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence — too often committed with impunity — continue to plague many zones of conflict. As Special Representative Wallström has made clear in various forums, including the Security Council, sexual violence in conflict is neither cultural nor sexual; it is criminal.

Acts of sexual violence are horrific crimes against individuals. Women, girls and boys who are raped are not only heartlessly robbed of their basic dignity during the time of the crime, but also bear the scars of those appalling acts long after hostilities have ceased. No amount of compensation can heal those wounds. The sad reality is that most victims are forgotten, and the perpetrators of the unspeakable crimes against them are never brought to justice. When committed in armed conflict and employed deliberately and systematically, such acts constitute a weapon of war designed to inflict suffering, instill fear and destroy the social fabric of communities and families. As is rightly emphasized in the Secretary-General's report,

“Depending on the circumstances of the offence, sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, an act of torture or a constituent act of genocide” (S/2010/604, para. 4).

The Secretary-General's report provides a number of important recommendations for improving the international community's efforts on this issue. There is a growing consensus about the need for timely, objective and accurate monitoring and reporting arrangements for incidents of sexual violence to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach to addressing violations and enforcing accountability. We support the listing of perpetrators of sexual violence, as encouraged by resolution 1960 (2010). This can serve as a means for advancing more focused measures for combating such atrocities when they occur.

Israel strongly supports the mandate that created the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and recognizes that Special Representative Wallström will play a pivotal role in addressing the issue. The newly formed UN Women, led by Executive Director Michelle Bachelet, also has a central role to play and is well positioned to work with the entire United Nations system.

The impact of sexual violence in conflict can be measured in the overwhelming pain it has inflicted on women and men, in the devastation it has wrought in communities and in the instability it continues to foster throughout entire regions. Israel believes that Member States, individually and collectively, must take firm action to curb this serious threat to human dignity and peace.

Together, we must make clear that the international community has zero tolerance for the perpetrators of sexual violence in armed conflict and will bring them to justice wherever they carry out their appalling and destructive crimes.