

Remarks by Minister of State Yelich to the UN Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict

April 15, 2015 - New York City, New York

Canada, along with all of you represented here today, is deeply concerned by the growing trend of sexual violence and abuse targeting women and girls in conflict situations.

We are alarmed by the recent report by the High Commissioner for Human Rights that points to possible war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), including rape and sexual slavery directed against civilian populations in Syria and Iraq. The reports of thousands of young Yazidi girls bought and sold in slave markets is nothing short of disturbing.

Unfortunately, these heinous crimes extend far beyond the tragic conflict in Iraq and Syria. Just yesterday, we marked the one-year anniversary of the terrible kidnapping of hundreds of young girls from their school in northern Nigeria. One year later, the fate of most of these innocent girls is still unknown, and the sustained and widespread acts of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains an ongoing crisis.

The sobering fact is that violence against women and girls is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world today, and we know that the consequences are only amplified in situations of conflict.

Canada is proud to contribute to global efforts to stop ISIL. Canada's contribution includes vital support for survivors of sexual violence, including through local partners, and the documentation of crimes and abuses in order that we can hold perpetrators to account.

Canadians reaffirmed their concern over the continuing atrocities in the DRC as our Parliament debated the ongoing crisis. And Canada's efforts to address sexual violence in the DRC have been producing results. Since 2006, more than 60,000 survivors have accessed health and psychological support; more than 15,000 survivors have acquired new job skills; and more than 800 perpetrators have been convicted. While this shows progress, much remains to be done.

We must do more, not only in ISIL-affected areas and in the DRC, but also in areas affected by Boko Haram as well as in the too many other countries listed by the Secretary-General in his excellent report on sexual violence.

Canada is very grateful for the work of Ms. Zainab Bangura, the Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict. Her efforts give voice to the too many voiceless women and girls who become survivors of these cowardly and despicable acts.

We must do more to support more survivors and ensure that they can live in dignity and security within their families and participate fully in the economic and social lives of their communities and countries.

We must ensure that the world investigates and documents these crimes and human rights abuses, and holds those responsible to account. We must ensure that those in leadership who order, permit or condone widespread and systematic sexual violence are tried and prosecuted. Canada is supporting the important work of Justice Rapid Response and UN Women in deploying trained experts to do this work.

We must do more to ensure that areas that are meant to be a safe haven or a refuge are spaces free from further sexual violence against women and girls and abusive practices such as child, early and forced marriage.

We must do more to ensure that security forces are equipped to protect and investigate these crimes, and are not the perpetrators.

And much remains to be done to change the structural causes of sexual violence in conflict such as discrimination, denial of human rights, and legal and social barriers that prevent women from fully contributing to the political and economic lives of their communities. Women's leadership and participation are essential tools to address sexual violence in conflict.

Today, I am proud to announce an additional Canadian commitment of \$5.4 million as a step toward achieving these goals.

The year 2015 is one of opportunities to advance efforts to end sexual violence in conflict. This includes UN reviews on women, peace and security, and on peace operations. This also includes work at the Human Rights Council in June to consider resolutions on violence against women, and on child, early and forced marriage.

These are opportunities to underline the importance of respect for the human rights and empowerment of women and girls. The consequences of this violence are not only felt by those victimized, but it also affects entire communities, undermining a country's ability to prosper. Women and girls must be empowered to move their communities

beyond these tragedies and ensure that they are fully engaged in all aspects of their security, economic, social and political development.

The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in December will consider a resolution on sexual violence in conflict, with some 170 countries participating. This will be an opportunity for countries and national societies to pledge actions to end sexual violence.

Canada remains committed to working at the UN, in other international forums, and in countries of concern, to see this work completed.

Women and girls deserve to live in safety and dignity, especially in conflict situations when their contributions to community, peace and resilience are so badly needed.

We must redouble our efforts.

Thank you.