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*Provisional***Statement by the Representative of the European Union, Mr. Van Den Akker:**

I am speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement. I thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, and Ms. Razia Sultana, who spoke on behalf of civil society and in particular the Rohingya, for their briefings. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for her leadership and dedication.

The European Union (EU) has been and will remain a staunch supporter of her important mandate. Conflict-related sexual violence, as well as all forms of violence and discrimination against women, girls, men and boys, are crimes and violations of human rights.

The European Union welcomes the report submitted by the Secretary-General (S/2018/250). It provides harrowing evidence of the occurrence of sexual violence in conflict in numerous places around the world. While there is improved awareness of the prevalence and hideousness of sexual violence in conflict and normative progress has been achieved, including in the Council through dedicated resolutions, countless women, men, girls and boys still live under the constant threat of sexual violence. Those living in areas plagued by conflict and violent extremism have the most to fear. Behind every statistic in the report — and unfortunately, we know that underreporting continues to be a challenge — we find a life and a person. Two simple questions are posed: What are we, as the international community, doing to put an end to that, and what is needed that we are not yet doing?

The European Union has taken concrete action to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence. Our engagement to achieve gender equality, security, sustaining peace and sustainable development is at the core of our daily work. The European Union emphasizes the continued importance of a holistic approach that addresses conflict-related sexual violence as part of the broader women and peace and security agenda, recognizing that sexual and gender-based violence are also the results of gender inequalities and women's and girls' subordinated positions and patriarchal contexts.

While sexual and gender-based violence predominantly target women and girls, men and boys are also among the primary and secondary victims of those crimes. The issue of stigma placed on the victim rather than on the perpetrator, where it would rightfully belong, must be analysed and addressed within

the broader context of sexual and gender-based violence. It is well known that stigma in the wake of sexual violence can have lasting and even lethal repercussions. Every person who has suffered from sexual violence must have the right and access to comprehensive health-care services, justice and reparations, and not be revictimized, rejected, ostracized or worse.

The European Union wants to see practical steps towards effective prevention and protection from conflict-related sexual violence. It remains unacceptable that most incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, including rape, continue to be met with impunity. It is nothing but a failure that, for instance, not a single member of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or Boko Haram has yet been prosecuted for sexual offences. Accountability and access to justice are a must. Victims and witnesses of sexual violence have to be ensured access to impartial and safe tribunals and reparations, including as a form of transitional gender justice, and their safety must be sufficiently addressed during and after those legal processes.

The European Union has implemented a global project to support gender-sensitive transitional justice. The project has been realized in Kenya, Kosovo, Colombia and the Philippines, and also supported the development of global norms and standards. Another EU action implemented in the Democratic Republic of the Congo strengthened the capacities of the military justice system to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Kasai and the east of the country. The project supported military courts, which then tried and convicted 11 militiamen and a provincial member of Parliament for crimes against humanity, rape and murder committed between 2013 and 2016. The EU is determined to remain a global leader in ending sexual and gender-based violence, including in conflict-related situations.

One example of that is the joint EU-United Nations Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls. Launched in September 2017 with an initial investment of €500 million by the EU, the Spotlight Initiative recognizes that women and girls are disproportionately subjected to violence, including femicide, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, trafficking and harmful practices. It is one of the largest-scale demonstrations of the political will of the European Union and the United Nations to say “enough is enough”. We must act now to address gender-based violence in all its forms. We continue to support United Nations action against conflict-related sexual violence.

We recognize that the United Nations peacekeeping operations play a vital role in the protection of women, girls, men and boys as part of their mandated task of protecting civilians. We also stress the importance of training peacekeeping personnel in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. In addition, we stress the importance of actions designed and implemented in partnership with civil society, ensuring that they are able to influence the analysis, design and planning of activities related to the prevention and protection against conflict-related sexual violence. We are troubled about the continuously shrinking space for civil society in many parts of the world, including attempts to silence women’s voices by threatening them with rape.

In 2017, the EU allocated almost €22 million in humanitarian aid to the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence worldwide. In June 2017, the EU took over the leadership of the Call

to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies — a global initiative of more than 76 stakeholders to make sure that all humanitarian actors work together to prevent and mitigate gender-based violence, from the earliest onset of a crisis.

Also in June 2017, the EU signed the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. With that signature, we committed to further strengthening the existing legal framework on preventing and combating violence against women. The EU is also continuously working to improve its procedures and practices in its civilian missions and military operations. Last year, we took stock of our programmes and projects that address conflict-related sexual violence. We have identified 43 multi-year projects, with an overall value of €43 million, and two multi-country programmes, with an overall value of €8.5 million.

The EU will continue to accelerate the implementation of our commitments to eliminating sexual and gender-based violence, both within and outside our borders and in times of peace, crisis and conflict. We will continue to provide specific support to victims of violence, including in the most remote and fragile areas. The EU is also strengthening efforts to ensure that women, girls, men and boys who arrive in the European Union fleeing conflict, instability, persecution, discrimination or violence, including sexual violence, have access to medical care, legal support, appropriate trauma counselling and psychosocial care.

The EU would like to see us all collectively continue to build on and strengthen what is already in place. Furthermore, we must all acknowledge and address the necessity of partnerships and clear roles and responsibilities, as well as the close alignment of programmes. We must also ask ourselves the uncomfortable question of whose security and safety are being addressed and resourced, and whether there are things we are not yet doing, but need to be done. We heed the call of the Secretary-General to reinforce our efforts, with urgency, to prevent and protect more women, girls, men and boys from falling victim to those heinous crimes and we hope that others will join us in that fight.

A full version of this statement will be posted online.