

**Security Council**

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*Provisional***Statement by the Representative of Lithuania, Mr. Oehri:**

At the outset, we thank the Peruvian presidency of the Security Council for convening an open debate on this important issue. We also welcome the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) and its recommendations. We also commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Pramila Patten, and her team for her dedication to combating and preventing sexual violence in conflict. We thank the Deputy Secretary-General and all briefers for their contribution.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and the representative of Canada, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

Time and again, since 2008, when Council resolution 1820 (2008) acknowledged sexual violence as a threat to security and an impediment to the restoration peace, we return to the security issue. Time and again, the Secretary-General's reports a sickening picture in 19 countries where rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy and other brutalities against women and men, girls and boys are employed by State and non-State actors as tactics of war and terrorism. Unstable political environments, continued armed clashes, weak State structures, a climate of impunity and stigmata related to sexual violence exacerbate an already grave situation.

Yet, most sexual crimes do not even get reported. Particularly vulnerable are women in remote rural areas, as well as displaced and refugee populations that live beyond the protection of rule-of-law institutions. The only way to effectively address this scourge is a comprehensive and integrated approach at the international, regional and national levels, which entails prevention, early warning, justice and accountability, the participation of women in political processes and political, social and economic empowerment.

Lithuania continuously underlines the importance of the Secretary-General's efforts to emphasize conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The overarching priority of prevention should be at the forefront of our fight against sexual violence in conflict. We should look for early warning indicators to identify potential conflict situations. Among the positive steps at the United Nations level, we would mention the efforts to engage with the listed national military and police forces for the development of action plans to address violations, the deployment of women protection advisers and the meaningful work of the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict in providing assistance to Governments by strengthening their capacities. However,

the perpetrators are too often left unpunished and crimes unresolved, which further fuels new cycles of violence.

We concur with the recommendation of the Secretary-General that sexual and gender-based violence should be systematically applied as designation criteria when adopting or renewing targeted sanctions in situations of armed conflict. Such a tool could be more widely used to deter sexual violence and to seek accountability. International justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court, can also play a critical role. To that end, having strong national institutions and an adequate judiciary and penal framework is essential, as is making sure that national civilian and military justice systems do not lack the capacity and expertise to prevent, investigate and prosecute sexual violence. Cooperation mechanisms, including through awareness-raising campaigns, action plans, capacity-building and shared good practices, should continue to actively promote effective responses to conflict-related sexual crimes. We commend the partnership between the Justice Rapid Response initiative and UN-Women. The deployment of justice experts from their joint roster to more than 50 missions greatly contributes to ending impunity for perpetrators.

Another vital issue that we should address is care for and the protection of survivors of sexual violence. Such violence affects entire generations, with the stigmatization of women and their children having lasting repercussions. Public, religious and community leaders can personally engage in helping to shift the stigma from the victims of sexual abuse to the perpetrators of those heinous crimes. Victims must have access to justice, accountability and redress mechanisms in order to ensure their reintegration into society and their economic empowerment.

Even the best tools that we have cannot tackle sexual violence in conflict if women continue to be on the sidelines of peace negotiations, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Being an active advocate of gender equality and the empowerment of women, Lithuania already contributes to achieving those goals through various initiatives. While striving to deploy more gender-balanced peacekeeping troop contingents, Lithuania continuously encourages female military and police personnel to apply. Training is also crucial to raising awareness and to improving the implementation of gender aspects in peace operations. Before their deployment, Lithuanian peacekeepers therefore undertake high-quality training on human rights and gender-related issues, in particular. As a gender-responsive legal and judicial system constitutes one of the building blocks of a resilient society, Lithuania remains committed to ensuring accountability for sexual and gender-based violence in conflict through national and international mechanisms.

Moreover, the President of Lithuania, Mrs. Dalia Grybauskaitė, chairs the Council of Women World Leaders, a network that seeks to mobilize influential women leaders around the world for collective action on issues of critical importance to women. In June this year, the Women Political Leaders Summit will take place in Vilnius, where women from all over the world will discuss, among other issues, how women, particularly political leaders, can advance peace and security. We also commend a promising achievement — the establishment of the Women African Leaders Network — and encourage similar initiatives in other regions of the world.

In conclusion, all Member States should redouble their efforts to implement Sustainable Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls to become actors rather than victims in their societies. All countries should review and revoke any discriminatory laws and practices and challenge stereotypes that hinder women's empowerment. Only then, will the hard-won progress in the area of women's rights be maintained and continue to break the cycles of gender-based violence. T