

Mr. Delattre (France) (spoke in French): I would like first of all to thank Uruguay for organizing today's debate in the Security Council. This subject is of central importance for countries in conflict, of course, but also for all of us. I would like to also thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Under-Secretary-General Adama Dieng for their briefings and their exemplary commitment. Lastly, I wish to give special thanks to Ms. Mina Jaf. Allow me to underscore the importance of the presence and interventions of civil society representatives in the Security Council, particularly in the context of the women and peace and security agenda. The voice of stakeholders on the ground is indeed irreplaceable.

Today's debate affords me the opportunity to convey France's sincere thanks to Ms. Zainab Bangura, who discharged her duties as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict with energy, passion and determination over the past few years. We also welcome the nomination of Ms. Pramila Patten for that position, and we count on her to carry on that essential mandate. The mandate of the Special Representative is one of the priorities of France's diplomacy. We reaffirm our support of the Office of the Special Representative, particularly of its Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. The work of that Team to strengthen national capabilities in combatting sexual violence is essential both with regard to preventing and combating impunity and supporting the victims of such violence.

Since the seminal adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), this Council has placed the participation of women in crisis management and recovery at the centre of its concerns, with the full support of France. Beyond the agenda on women and peace and security, the question of sexual violence in conflict is taking a growing place in our work. At Spain's initiative, last December we also adopted resolution 2331 (2016), which, taking full account of the link between human trafficking, sexual violence and terrorism, is a great step forward for the Council.

Despite our efforts, in many theatres of conflict women continue to be the primary victims of large-scale, often systematic, sexual violence. Actions committed by Da'esh or Boko Haram show the most extreme forms of such violence, which particularly targets women and children. For those terrorist groups, sexual violence is a weapon of war, but also a source of financing and a recruitment tool. In Syria, rape, forced marriage, sexual slavery and prostitution particularly threaten women and adolescents, especially in regions controlled by Da'esh. In Iraq, Da'esh has set up a marketplace where women and girls from minority groups, including Yezidis and Christians, are sold into sexual slavery.

The large-scale abductions of girls and women by Boko Haram in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria, go hand in hand with the systematic practice of sexual violence, the most common being rape. The abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls in the spring of 2014 — 82 of whom were freed a week ago — brought into broad daylight a common practice of that terrorist group and others, used for intimidation and propaganda and as recruitment strategy, but also as favoured instrument of their ideology.

Boko Haram, Da'esh and other groups like Al-Shabaab in Somalia have integrated those practices into their doctrine and strategy. Those acts, which are morally revolting

to the human conscience, can legally be classified as war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide. The members of terrorist groups who organize and commit such acts should be held to account in due course. We cannot accept that such crimes remain unpunished.

Beyond terrorist groups, sexual violence is used on a large scale as a weapon of war by armed groups or forces, for example in South Sudan and in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, but also in northwestern Central African Republic. Far from being a matter of individual cases or the acts of lost soldiers, in many regions sexual violence is a means to terrorize populations or as an instrument of collective punishment against ethnic or religious groups. Its primary target is women, but is also used against children and men.

In the face of those odious acts, indignation is not enough — we must act. The international community is not condemned to impotence. National authorities, which have the lion's share of the responsibility to stamp out sexual violence, can and must make a difference. Therefore I commend the decisive action of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire that enabled the country to be removed from the list annexed to the Secretary-General's report on sexual violence in conflict (S/2017/249). This first delisting must open the way to others. I know that the teams of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General are continuing their efforts in that respect.

The prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence in their corresponding national jurisdictions, as in the case of Guinea, is also an encouraging sign. So is the growing mobilization of international criminal jurisdictions, including the first decision by the International Criminal Court, on 21 June last year, that recognized the use of rape and sexual violence as war crimes in a Central African Republic case, for acts committed in 2002 and 2003. But those successes in the fight against sexual violence in conflict are still too infrequent. We must strengthen our efforts and take more systematic action by mobilizing around several specific priorities.

The first priority is the fight against impunity. Everything must be done so that those responsible for sexual violence be prosecuted by the competent national jurisdiction and, failing that, by international criminal jurisdictions. In that regard, when prosecution is impossible in the short term, we must ensure that a mechanism is set in place for documenting such crimes. In Syria, the International Independent Investigation Commission and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 can play that indispensable role, as the latter also seeks to facilitate investigation and prosecution of alleged perpetrators of such crimes.

Similarly, as underlined in resolution 2331 (2016), the sanctions regimes in question could more effectively target groups and individuals responsible for sexual violence, especially when those acts are used by terrorist groups as a source of financing or a means of recruitment. Other initiatives are also to be commended, for example the partnership between UN-Women and the Justice Rapid Response initiative, which seeks to train sexual violence experts to serve as a pool of personnel that could be immediately deployed in the framework of investigation mechanisms.

The second priority is prevention. The risk of sexual violence must be fully incorporated into any crisis- prevention mechanism. Such violence is often a sign of the deterioration of the political and security situation in a given zone or country. As such, it calls for a rapid reaction, which means that we must have appropriate detection means, including in peacekeeping operations.

The third priority is support for national authorities in their efforts to prevent, combat and persecute sexual violence, as well as to provide medical and social support to its victims. Strengthening the capacities of countries concerned means pursuing bilateral cooperation and enhancing support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Taking that dimension into account in the framework of peacekeeping operations should also help. We must be mindful of this matter when mandates are renewed, but also ensure that posts for counsellors on gender-based and sexual violence are provided and adequately funded.

I also note that supporting national authorities must go hand in hand with the more support for those within civil society who combat sexual violence and help its victims. Last month's assassination in South Kivu of Dr. Gildo Byamungu Magaju is a tragic reminder of that. In that connection, we urgently call on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to continue to effectively ensure the safety of Dr. Denis Mukwege.

The fourth priority is to ensure that both peacekeeping operations and national operations under a Security Council mandate are exemplary. France, for whom that is the intangible policy, unreservedly supports the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual exploitation and abuse. We welcome his renewed ambition in that regard, as evidenced by his proposals to enhance the response of the United Nations, as stated in his March report.

At the national level, we have established an active prevention policy, particularly through training our deployed staff and effective investigation mechanisms. The competent national jurisdictions are systematically and immediately seized in the event of an allegation. Furthermore, we actively support the work of the International Criminal Court in that regard.

The final priority is the determination to include the fight against sexual violence within a comprehensive approach to the issue of gender equality in conflicts. We cannot isolate sexual violence from the situation of women in the societies concerned or from their presence in crisis-management processes. We must therefore include our efforts to prevent and combat sexual violence within the broader framework set out in the Council's women and peace and security agenda. That requires the strengthening of the role of women in crisis prevention and peacekeeping-operations mechanisms and in the political processes of mediation and crisis resolution.

Faced with the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and terrorism, the international community must demonstrate its absolute determination. Rest assured that France will do the same.