

Mr. Koroma (Sierra Leone): At the outset, I would like to commend you, Mr. President, and your country, Uruguay, for convening today's open debate on women and peace and security in relation to sexual violence in conflict. I would also like to commend Justice Rapid Response and UN-Women for their initiatives.

Sierra Leone is pleased to once more join other Member States in deliberating on this all-important subject. We wish to take this opportunity to recognize and thank the outgoing Under-Secretary-General, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, and her team for their excellent work in raising global awareness on the subject of sexual violence in conflict and giving voice to the voiceless. We also want to register our support to her successor, Ms. Patten. My delegation looks forward to working with her in the years to come to fulfil her mandate.

Sierra Leone joins all peace-loving nations of the world in strongly condemning all forms of violence perpetrated against women in conflict situations. This menace is a threat to international peace and security and must be taken seriously. We also strongly maintain that perpetrators must be held to account for any kind of violence committed against women in conflict situations, for the days of impunity are over. They must not find any hiding place in any part of the world. The use of sexual violence by terrorist groups, violent extremists and other non-State actors must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Perpetrators of sexual violence can be defeated only by global action and collaboration. No State can do it alone.

As Council members may be aware, Sierra Leone suffered 11 years of an intensely violent civil conflict, and a lot of atrocities were committed against women. Since the guns fell silent in January 2002, the country has been making steady socioeconomic progress, consolidating peace and good governance. The lessons learnt from that war have strengthened our resolve to embrace the values of a peaceful society in which respect for the rule of law and women's rights is given priority.

The setting up of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which has been succeeded by the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone — which currently has in custody those who bore the greatest responsibility — remains a vivid demonstration of the resolve of the international community and the Government of Sierra Leone to ensure accountability for horrendous crimes, including sexual violence in conflict.

No effort should be spared by the United Nations to invest resources in identifying early-warning signs of conflict and conflict prevention, because women, girls and children are usually the targets in conflicts situations. It is very important to note that in the discussions of sexual violence in conflict here at the United Nations, women should be given more opportunity to participate in the highest decision-making bodies. Also, the capacities of countries emerging from conflict must be enhanced, particularly in the area of conflict prevention and institutional capacity-building. The need to invest in women's development towards our present-day aspiration for global,

regional and national development cannot be overemphasized. Sierra Leone strongly upholds the relevant protocols relating to women's empowerment, including the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence against Women.

The Government of Sierra Leone continues to enact several post-conflict policy and legislative frameworks aimed at addressing gender inequalities, lack of respect for women's rights and other negative traditional norms affecting women. Key among these include the Gender Justice Laws or the Three Gender Acts. These exemplify our resolve to attain gender equality and empower women. Sierra Leone continues to make modest contributions to international peacekeeping missions. Our contingents of troops are given the requisite training in the prevention of sexual violence in conflict and have performed admirably. We look forward to more opportunities to be given to our troops to serve humankind.

Allow me to reaffirm Sierra Leone's commitment to all international instruments aimed at ending violence against women and girls, and to reaffirm the importance of education, economic empowerment, and the modification of social and cultural patterns of behaviour of men and boys towards women and girls as integral parts of overcoming violence against women and girls, both in conflict and in post-conflict situations.

In conclusion, the fight to end sexual violence against women and girls in conflict cannot be achieved unless there is an effective, efficient and credible international legal institution that is able to bring to book those who have perpetrated and continue to perpetrate horrendous crimes against the vulnerable and defenceless, including women, girls and children in conflict situations. In that regard, my delegation continues to support the International Criminal Court, which remains at the moment the most effective international legal institution that is supposed to address impunity.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge the good work of Justice Rapid Response and UN-Women and to pledge our unflinching support and solidarity with them in the fight against impunity for sexual violence in conflict.