

Mr. Laassel (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): First, allow me to thank Uruguay for organizing today's debate and choosing the theme of sexual violence in conflict as a tactic of war and terrorism, the importance of which has become self-evident owing to its urgency, acuteness and impact on societies. I also thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Acting Special Representative Adama Dieng for their respective briefings this morning, as well as Ms. Mina Jaf as a representative of civil society.

At all times and regardless of the victims, violence is always reprehensible. However, sexual violence in times of conflict is even more so. We strongly condemn such practices, which date back to another era that still persists today. Today's debate is a forceful and eloquent illustration of the phenomenon. As evidence, we need only cite the relevant resolutions adopted by the Security Council that have followed resolution 1325 (2000), as well as resolution 2331 (2016).

There is no doubt about it: Da'esh, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and many other terrorist groups mentioned in the report (S/2017/249) of the Secretary-General use sexual violence as a tactic of war, a weapon of terror and a source of financial revenue used to augment their resources and augment their power. They openly advocate those practices, which figure prominently among their strategic objectives and ideologies. No woman, girl, man or boy is spared. Women and girls suffer the most from the devastating consequences of conflicts and pay a heavy price because of their increased vulnerability. They are now offered up as the spoils of war. For their part, men and boys are often subjected to forced labour, domestic slavery, trafficking in human organs and even sexual exploitation. Sexual violence does not only affect the victims, it eats away at and rots communities and societies to their very core. Its goal is to hurt the body, tear down dignity, destroy the social fabric and obliterate reconstruction efforts from the onset. It destabilizes, destroys and terrorizes societies affected by conflicts. Those who commit such heinous crimes must be brought to justice and sentenced with the maximum punishment.

My country, which is a member of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, chaired by Canada, and the Group of Friends for Gender Parity, led by Colombia, which adopted the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, subscribes to its international commitments to combat all forms of sexual violence, including in times of conflict, and considers them barbaric, brutal and inhuman methods and practices, having serious consequences on the process of achieving lasting peace and reconciliation.

Because of the systematic and premeditated nature of acts of sexual violence, there is an urgent need for innovations to counter that scourge. In its firm devotion to international law, Morocco is committed to encouraging an inclusive approach to combating sexual violence that takes into account the complexity of the causes of that scourge, as well as the interests and needs of the persons concerned. It is an approach that calls for strong measures concerning accountability for all those who continue to act in defiance of

international humanitarian law, human rights law and the Geneva Conventions. Moreover, it is essential that we alter the stigmatization of victims of sexual violence and the children born as the result of such violence.

In conclusion, protection, prevention and the fight against impunity must be our watchwords. It is our collective responsibility and duty. International law, including international humanitarian law, must be applied without exception. It is incumbent upon us to protect and respond to the needs of victims, prevent sexual violence and ensure that the perpetrators of those violations are held fully accountable for their actions. It is high time to invest in peace, give victims back their dignity and make planning for the reconstruction of societies and lasting peace a reality.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Secretary-General António Guterres — the author of the new United Nations approach for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, as outlined in his report (A/71/818), which prioritizes the rights and dignity of victims and calls for the establishment of a zero-tolerance policy. We are confident that that new strategy will bring change.