

**Mr. Ramírez Carreño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to welcome Mr. José Luis Cancela, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay. We are delighted to have you, Sir, presiding over today's important debate. We therefore thank Uruguay, a sister country, for convening today's debate, and congratulate the entire delegation, in particular Ambassador Rosselli, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council during the month of May. We believe that it will be successful month for the country and for the Council.

At the same time, we would like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, for being here today and for her briefing on the report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence (S/2017/249). We are also grateful for the briefings by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, and the Executive Director of Women's Refugee Route, Ms. Jaf.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to reiterate its most categorical condemnation of sexual violence in armed conflicts as a crime that violates human dignity and is a violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The report being discussed today highlights the ongoing rise in the number of atrocities and crimes of sexual violence, which are committed in times of armed conflict and are part and parcel of systematic action taken by extremist and terrorist groups.

Venezuela has repeatedly stated in all forums of the Organization that one of the causes of this situation has been that non-State armed groups are being trained, supplied and supported in an effort to destabilize and break up States, forcing the collapse of their institutions and providing a breeding ground for impunity and the commission of such atrocities. Worsening extremism and religious and ethnic intolerance as a strategy to destabilize countries causes women and children to become victims of sexual violence, which is employed as a form of punishment or punitive action against minorities.

If the ban on providing arms and financial support to extremist and terrorist groups were fully respected under international law, there would be a decrease in both the operational capacity of non-State actors and terrorists and in the incidences of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. We firmly believe that accountability is also key to preventing such crimes. We cannot give way to impunity in crimes of this kind. Venezuela advocates effective accountability for all forms of sexual violence and the use of exemplary sanctions on all instigators and perpetrators of such crimes.

Venezuela also reiterates its support for the Organization's zero-tolerance policy and demands accountability for all crimes of violence and sexual abuse committed by any foreign force and by military, police or civilian personnel deployed in peacekeeping operations and special political missions, as well as by staff of the Organization not deployed in such operations. In that regard, the United Nations is still expected to respond to the victims of such crimes.

On another note, we believe that building capacity in national institutions

related to justice, health and social welfare systems in countries in situations of armed conflict and post-conflict plays a fundamental role. It is therefore necessary to pool our efforts so that, while fully respecting the sovereignty of the States concerned, such capacity can be developed and strengthened to allow for adequate and timely treatment and accountability, as well as the rehabilitation of victims and children who are products of that violence. We call for guarantees and respect for the right to an identity, which includes, among others, the right to a nationality, which is a fundamental right of every human being and is also key to being able to enjoy other fundamental rights.

We would therefore like to acknowledge the important work being done by the Expert Team on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict in support of the national authorities of countries aimed at building institutional and technical capacity to address this issue. We hope that such an important group will not be subject to budget cuts. The theme of sexual violence must be addressed within the context of peace processes and ceasefires, as well as in all demobilization and reintegration processes in which the United Nations participates. Mediators and special envoys involved in such processes must have the requisite training in order to respond appropriately to the issue as it emerges in various specific contexts. In addition, efforts must be pursued to improve the preparedness of all field staff and to increase the number of gender experts and women's protection advisers in the various missions.

In conclusion, Venezuela reaffirms its commitment to helping to strengthen the institutional administrative and legal mechanisms tasked with combating this type of crime, which violates the dignity of human beings.