

**Mr. Zaayman** (South Africa): I congratulate you, Mr. President, and the Uruguayan delegation on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of May and for organizing this open debate on the very important issue of sexual violence as a tactic of war and terrorism.

My delegation wishes to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, for her statement, and Mr. Adama Dieng and Ms. Mina Jaf for their briefings. We also welcome the report the Secretary-General (S/2017/249).

In war and conflict, women and children continue to be the victims of deliberate attacks, including terrorist acts, and indiscriminate and excessive violence. These acts of violence, when carried out in a systematic and widespread manner and as part of an attack against innocent populations, stress an armed conflict and become an enormous obstacle to its resolution and to building peace.

Sexual abuse and discrimination are directly linked to gender inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization. Sexual violence is a deliberate and intolerable violation of the victim's human rights. When women and girls are preyed upon, abused and raped, the international community has a responsibility to speak out on their behalf and to act as their advocates and guardians.

Over the years the international community has come to a deeper understanding of the unique impact that armed conflict has on women and children. There is an agreement that the participation of women is essential to ensuring conflict resolution, inclusive reconciliation, peacebuilding and sustainable peace. In that regard, resolution 1325 (2000) and all subsequent resolutions provide the basis for a more focused and systemic response to the role of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. The Security Council has also adopted a number of resolutions dealing with sexual violence as a tactic of war and terrorism, including resolution 2106 (2013), which calls for those found to have committed acts of sexual violence to be held accountable to the fullest extent. Despite these laudable efforts, these atrocities continue unabated. Our discussions and debates, such as this one today, must result in continued meaningful action to protect the victims of such abuses.

We underscore the need to make full use of the instruments and tools created by the Security Council, including all of these resolutions, and wish to emphasize the following points.

First, South Africa believes that a crucial aspect of ensuring that women are safeguarded from becoming victims of sexual violence and abuse is to increase the number of women peacekeepers deployed in peacekeeping missions. That would provide for a safer environment for women to report instances of sexual violence and abuse, as well as their concerns and overall perspectives about the security situation. It is against that background that South Africa continues to deploy more women peacekeepers in United Nations peacekeeping missions and urges other Member States to do the same. The contribution of women to peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding

efforts is recognized as a contributing factor to the effectiveness and long-term success of United Nations deployments.

Secondly, South Africa strongly supports the Secretary-General's initiatives in deploying women's protection advisers in United Nations missions. As the Secretary-General has recommended, the Security Council should ensure the accelerated deployment and provision of adequate funding for such advisers. That would facilitate the implementation of the resolutions on sexual violence in conflict, including the new monitoring requirements set forth in resolution 2331 (2016). Crucially, Member States should support the inclusion of such posts in the mandates and budgets of peacekeeping operations.

Thirdly, we support the Secretary-General's recommendations that call for a mandatory component of predeployment training for all peacekeeping personnel on gender sensitivity, preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and addressing conflict-related sexual violence. That should also include better identification and response to indicators of trafficking in persons in areas affected by conflict, in line with resolution 2331 (2016). In that regard, South Africa established standby investigative teams with the capacity to deploy to a mission within 72 hours.

Fourthly, we also support the Secretary-General's call on the Security Council to give due consideration to the risk factors and early warning signs of sexual violence in its monitoring of conflict situations, especially in relation to periods of rising violent extremism, political instability, elections, civil strife and mass population movements. In that regard, the Security Council is also urged to work with the Secretary-General towards the development of a protocol for preventing sexual abuse as part of peacekeeping mandates, and for the General Assembly to include it in the budgets for high-risk peacekeeping operations.

Fifthly, we call on the United Nations to intensify efforts to fight this scourge by enhancing prevention and swift responses to these crimes. As the Secretary-General's report indicates, that would also include dedicated and additional human and financial resources. South Africa therefore supports the proposal of the Secretary-General for the establishment of victims-assistance-support functions at United Nations Headquarters.

Sixthly, we also believe that efforts to fight sexual violence in conflict need to take into account measures to ensure adequate information, fact-finding and proper documentation. Raising awareness of women's and girls' rights and of the existence of sexual violence against men and boys are equally important. In that regard, we support the proposals of the Secretary-General for the establishment of a system-wide consolidated repository of case information.

In conclusion, the international community must continue to work towards a non-discriminatory and non-sexist global society in which all women and girls are treated as equal citizens. The end of discrimination against women will go a long way towards addressing the root causes of sexual violence.

Finally, let us recognize that there cannot be peace without justice.

Demanding accountability from all parties to a conflict, together with the fight against impunity, remains our prime responsibility. Let me end with a quotation from President Mandela delivered in 1997 at the National Men's March against Sexual Abuse:

“As long as we take the view that these are problems for women alone to solve, we cannot expect to reverse the high incidence of rape and child abuse ... We will not defeat this scourge that affects each and every one of us”.