

Ms. Zahir (Maldives): At the outset, I would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency for convening this important and timely open debate. I would also like to express our appreciation to Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the briefers for their updates and dedicated efforts on this issue. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2017/249) on this topic, issued last month, which makes clear both the scale and the significance of the challenges we must now consider.

As so vividly described in the Secretary-General's report and by those who have addressed the Security Council today, sexual violence has increasingly become part of the toolbox of terror with which armed groups seek to consolidate their influence and extend their power at the expense of those who are exposed to their predations. Indeed, while sexual violence is often closely linked to gender-based violence, its victims include men and boys as well as women and girls. It is often the case that those who deign to use sexual violence as a tool in conflict see neither gender nor age as any hindrance. That is even more the case with terrorist and violent extremist groups. Some, such as Da'esh, even use the prospect of being able to commit such acts as part of their recruitment strategy.

With that stark reality in mind, the Maldives believes that the United Nations, and especially the Security Council, should comprehensively adapt its prevention, protection and recovery efforts to the increasingly asymmetric threats posed by non-State, extremist and terrorist armed groups through sexual violence. The Maldives welcomes resolutions 2242 (2015) and 2331 (2016), which make clear the Council's recognition of the fact that sexual violence is frequently used as a tactic of terrorism and provide a clear starting point for deepening the strategic alignment of efforts against sexual violence, both across the United Nations and among Member States. They make it clear that the obligations to abide by the protections afforded by international human rights law apply to State and non-State actors alike, and that it is incumbent on all parties to respect their provisions.

In that regard, the Maldives welcomes and fully endorses the Secretary-General's recommendation that the Security Council employ all means at its disposal to ensure that all parties to a conflict comply with international law regarding protection against sexual violence. In turn, that should be enforced through the systematic monitoring of compliance, the implementation of legislative and institutional arrangements and, when violations do occur, by referring matters to the International Criminal Court.

While people of both genders are very much at risk of being targeted for abuse, it goes without saying that the burden of sexual violence in conflict falls overwhelmingly and disproportionately on women and girls. In that context, the Maldives would like to recall resolution 1325 (2000), which has been a landmark guide for efforts to ensure women's full involvement and equal participation in all elements of the peace and security framework, including conflict prevention, humanitarian response and peacekeeping efforts. Resolution 1325 (2000) also makes clear the importance of ensuring that all parties to a conflict, again including non-State parties, remove women

and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual violence. This resolution provides a strong foundation for our efforts in that regard, and is a natural starting point for developing ways to reinforce existing mechanisms and explore new avenues through which we can protect civilians against the threat of sexual violence.

The Maldives also fully supports the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse and exploitation by United Nations peacekeepers, and encourages the Security Council to include tasks related to women, peace and security in peacekeeping mission mandates. In that spirit, the Government of the Maldives has pledged a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of gender-based violence. We have also enacted laws prohibiting sexual harassment and abuse and on sexual offences, domestic violence prevention and social protection in our efforts to raise awareness and create the fundamental provisions necessary for the protection of all women and girls. In 2016 we enacted a gender equality bill that contains comprehensive provisions that further strengthen article 17 (a) of our Constitution, which entitles rights and freedoms to everyone without discrimination of any kind, including with regard to race, national origin, sex, age, mental or physical disability.

Renewed and reinvigorated action at the local, regional and international levels alike is needed to protect and empower the victims of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. Given the heinousness of such acts, it is essential, if we are to remain credible as an Organization, that the United Nations and its Member States be especially vigilant and adhere to the standards of zero tolerance and the highest probity on the matter. The Maldives is strongly committed to deepening its cooperation with international partners in that regard, and wherever possible pledges to continue offering its support so that every woman, man and child, whatever their situation, can have the chance to determine their own future and realize their own aspirations.