

**Security Council**

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*Provisional***Statement by the Representative of the Russian Federation, Mr. Polyanskiy:**

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's meeting, and to express our gratitude to the briefers for their interesting and useful information. I would particularly like to thank Ms. Razia Sultana for her interesting briefing, and I hope that during Council members' upcoming visit to Myanmar, in which we will be participating, we will learn more about the issue.

Since the Security Council began to deal with the problem of sexual violence in conflict, almost 10 years ago, much has been achieved.

First, it is now generally understood that sexual violence is a serious challenge rather than a collateral or secondary manifestation of individuals' baser instincts, exacerbated by situations involving armed conflict. There can also be no doubt that sexual violence is a consequence of conflict, including as a result of impunity for those who commit such crimes. In our view, therefore, eliminating sexual violence, as well as other forms of violence directed at civilians, can be achieved only by resolving armed conflicts by peaceful means and eradicating their root causes.

We have traditionally supported the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In particular, we greatly appreciate her work on strengthening national capacity-building and developing dialogue with religious and other traditional leaders in addressing problems related to the stigmatization of victims of sexual violence and their rehabilitation. So far, unfortunately, we have failed to defeat the evil of violence. The statistics relating to the increase in sex crimes by members of terrorist groups is particularly disturbing.

We urge States to cooperate more actively in dismantling the so-called shadow economy of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which profits from trafficking in persons and sexual slavery, for instance. We hope that such crimes will be effectively documented and investigated, for which primary responsibility lies with the relevant authorities of the States on whose territory they are committed.

We would also like to take a separate look at a number of positions presented in today's report (S/2018/250). Although we share most of its conclusions and recommendations, I feel it is important to draw attention to a number of worrying aspects.

First, as a general observation, if Special Representative Patten is to effectively carry out the tasks she has been set, she should make sure that she continues to stick strictly to her mandate. She should not divert her efforts and resources to the issues of gender equality overall, migration or violence against women generally. That does not mean that those problems are not important. They are, but they are not part of her mandate. Her focus should be on situations of armed conflict, and particularly those where sexual violence is occurring on a large scale. For several years now, we have been seriously concerned about attempts to broaden the interpretation of the scope of the Security Council's mandate on combating sexual violence in conflict by using a different term — "conflict-related sexual violence".

As we see it, what may at first seem to be mere technical differences actually run the risk of going beyond the Security Council's remit and infringing on the mandates of other United Nations bodies. It is essential for these purposes to differentiate between acts of sexual violence as war crimes or similar criminal acts. Another trend we would also like to comment on is the growing emphasis in the report on human rights issues. We recall that sexual violence in conflict is first and foremost a violation of international humanitarian law.

That is why both Government entities and non-Government participants in an armed conflict are obliged to ensure compliance with norms aimed at combating sexual violence, and this is something that should be monitored systematically.

Lastly and most importantly, this year we have seen ill-advised attempts to use the issue of sexual violence in conflict to resolve narrow political issues, something that is reflected in the country section of the report. In the section on Syria, in particular, the problem of atrocities against women and girls perpetrated by fighters from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other terrorist organizations committing outrageous acts in Syria is very much glossed over. The evaluations and figures are presented in such a way that one must extrapolate to get the full picture. How should we interpret that? How will the militias and terrorists react to that timidity? Probably with the thought that their crimes are escaping the international community's attention and that they can continue them. At the same time, there is not a word about the substantive change in the security situation in Syria, of the fact that a greater part of its territory has been cleansed of terrorists, or that thanks to difficult, painstaking efforts, large numbers of civilians, a significant percentage of whom are women and children, some of them victims of sexual violence and abuse, have been liberated from the militias.

For example, during a period of active fighting, some 165,000 people were evacuated from eastern Ghouta alone. We believe that a one-sided approach, a lack of full disclosure or a failure to mention objective realities can only harm the Special Representative's mandate and the effectiveness of her efforts to combat sexual violence in conflict.

We would also like to emphasize separately that the zero-tolerance policy that the report welcomes should not operate on the principle of us versus them. Any efforts to exempt national peacekeeping contingents acting under Security Council mandates, or representatives of non-governmental organizations working in countries, from responsibility for committing such acts are unacceptable. In that regard, we want to point out that Paris has tried to sweep under the rug the examination of cases

of sexual violence, including against children, by French soldiers during Operation Sangaris in the Central African Republic.

Despite the fact that the investigation was supposedly carried out, no one was punished, as far as one can tell. That is outrageous. There are also other cases where a double standard is clearly applied. For example, in considering the draft of resolution 2410 (2018) on extending the mandate the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti, the United States delegation refused to establish the importance of ensuring that all accusations of sexual violence by representatives of non-governmental organizations accredited with the United Nations are reported.

In conclusion, I would like to note that we have not lost the hope that measures taken in the United Nations, including through today's discussions, will contribute to the goal of eliminating sexual and all other forms of violence against civilians in armed conflict and ultimately to resolving those conflicts to the benefit of international peace and security.