

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia):

Georgia aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the delegation of the European Union (EU). I would like to make the following comments in my national capacity.

We welcome this annual debate of the Security Council on women and peace and security and the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). We also welcome the report (S/2016/822) of the Secretary-General.

One of my country's persistent concerns relates to the implementation of this resolution in conflict-affected territories. We all know that 20 per cent of my country's territory remains under illegal foreign military occupation and that hundreds of thousands of Georgian internally displaced persons and refugees who are victims of ethnic cleansing are denied the right to return to their homes, while the fundamental rights of women and girls inside the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions in South Ossetia continue to be neglected.

My Government spares no effort to develop and implement higher standards for the full protection of women's rights. We fully recognize the benefits of enhancing women's leadership and participation in decision-making in conflict resolution, prevention and management processes. Our strong commitment is well reflected in our national action plan on women and peace and security, and Georgia was one of the first countries to adopt a separate policy document on this very important topic.

Georgia shares the view that effective conflict prevention must start from an understanding of the broad and deep insecurity that permeates women's lives prior to conflict and the ways that pre-conflict structural inequality can facilitate violence and insecurity, as stated in the global study on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). At the same time, we need to address the current challenges in peacekeeping in a comprehensive and transparent way that acknowledges the centrality of the protection of civilians. Georgia is fully committed to a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping and to ensuring the full accountability of perpetrators, by responding to alleged crimes in a survivor-centred manner.

It was precisely with that approach that the Georgian Government and the Georgian armed forces reacted immediately to the allegations voiced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in January with regard to the sexual abuse cases involving minors by members of foreign military forces in the Central African Republic. Having condemned any violence against local civilian populations, the Georgian Government created an ad hoc inter-agency investigation team, involving not only the representative of the Office of the Prosecutor and the Minister of Defence, but also experts on human rights and child protection services, as well as psychologists.

The team established direct communication and worked closely with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the Executive Director of UNICEF, the European Union Military Committee, as well as the Legal Director of Médecins sans frontières. Georgia officially requested the engagement of all the relevant parties in the investigation process by assigning respective points of contact on the ground. In June 2016, the team travelled to Bangui for the on site

phase of the investigation, conducting inquiries and interviews with alleged victims in close cooperation with the EU, MINUSCA and UNICEF. United Nations agencies acknowledged that the team was highly professional and exemplary.

Materials collected during the visit to the Central African Republic are being carefully studied. So far, preliminary investigation data reveal no sign of Georgian soldiers' involvement in the crimes committed. Should the results of the investigation prove them innocent, Georgia would appreciate acknowledgement by the relevant United Nations bodies.

We hope that the measures undertaken by my Government that I mentioned will serve as an example of best practice when it comes to a prompt and effective response to cases of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. We also encourage other countries to do the same as, we believe that only through such an approach can we produce a sustained change in dealing with the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse in conflict situations.