

Ms. Gerashchenko (Ukraine) (spoke in French):

Allow me to thank the Secretary-General; Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN-Women; and the other briefers for their remarks. We very much appreciate the recent report of the Secretary-General on the issue of women and peace and security (S/2016/822), issued in September. We approve of the activities of new structures of the United Nations, including the Informal Expert Group set up under resolution 2242 (2015) on the problems of women and peace and security, and the national coordinators in Member States dealing with questions of women and peace and security. The protection of women during armed conflicts is an international issue.

Allow me now to speak in Russian to inform the Council of the situation of Ukrainian women since the war was launched against Ukraine.

(spoke in Russian)

I want to appeal to citizens of the Russian Federation, that they should be able to know the real truth of the war in Donbas and of the suffering of Ukrainian women and children. Unfortunately, we have first-hand experience of the horrible effects of conflicts on women and children. The victims of Russian military aggressions since the spring of 2014 have been millions of Ukrainian women, and the Russian Federation is fully responsible for violating human rights, both in occupied Crimea and Donbas. This was recognized by two recent resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Women and children are the most vulnerable during these conflicts. Allow me to provide a few harrowing figures. According to recent data, in Ukraine today there are 1.7 million internally displaced persons. Of those, about 900,000 are women and more than 236,000 are children. Over the past two years in Donbas, 495 women have died in the civilian population.

In this Chamber I would like to recall Yelena Lafazan, a Russian-speaking woman from Mariupol. She protected her 9-year-old daughter with her own body during the attacks in Mariupol two years ago. When she died, she had not even turned 40, and her child lost one of her limbs. In another instance, Klim Klimenko, a 3-year-old child, was protected by her mother during a shooting in Kramatorsk in February 2015. The heroism of her mother, who was not even 30 years old, saved her life. During the armed conflict launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, 68 children died and 152 children were seriously injured. It is quite possible, though, that the figure we have is incorrect because neither Ukrainian authorities nor international humanitarian organizations yet have access to the occupied territories. We therefore cannot know the exact number of the women and children who have died. That is with regard to the civilian population.

With regard to the military, since the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in Donbas began, 2,130 soldiers of the Ukrainian armed forces have died, including the two women. Those soldiers were protecting their motherland from the aggressors. As a result of the war, 1,937 children have become orphans, 1,213 women have become widows, 1,975 Ukrainian mothers have lost children and 142 Ukrainian women are awaiting the return of their family members from prisons in the occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. And as a member of the Minsk Group on humanitarian questions, I wish to inform the Council that, unfortunately, the process of releasing the detained persons has been blocked, and that is being used to blackmail the Ukrainian authorities.

In this particularly difficult situation regarding violations of the rights of women and children in the occupied territories, the Russian occupying army has taken Ukrainian women as hostages. According to the Security Service of Ukraine, there are 238 Ukrainian women in prison at the moment. At the moment, 233 women have been found they either have been released, or their bodies have been identified, although five were left in prison. The most well-known Kremlin prisoner, Nadiya Savchenko, spent almost 2 years in a Russian prison. Another Ukrainian woman — a journalist, Maria Varfolomeyeva — was imprisoned for more than a year in Luhansk. She was freed in March of this year.

Who was exchanged for those two Ukrainian women? Russian militarymen Aleksandrov and Yerofeev were released to free Savchenko, and one Ivan Gorbunov to free Ms. Varfolomeyeva. This is a symbol of the Russian Federation's war in Donbas. Russian military personnel are fighting by killing and taking as prisoners Ukrainian women and children. Conflicts are always accompanied by violence against women and girls. We are aware of cases of trafficking in persons on temporarily occupied territories, sexual violence and exploitation, and the use of minors in military activities, which are incompatible with human rights law and unacceptable in our contemporary world and goes against the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by the Russian Federation. .

Allow me now to offer a few examples. Last month we discovered a shocking fact regarding the gender element of the violence in the temporary occupied territories of Donetsk oblast. Such violence was perpetrated by members of armed gangs and terrorist groups, including fighters of the so-called Pyatnashka International Brigade of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic. That involved the setting up of establishments where minors were forced to provide sexual services. Human trafficking also took place. Foreign nationals established studios to produce child pornography, and the materials were then distributed outside of Ukraine. Furthermore, children were recruited and received military training to participate in the fighting. That is yet another example of what we are also trying to resolve in the Minsk Working Group on Humanitarian Issues.

In the prisons of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, a group of teenagers is being detained under a charge of sabotage. We have videos of their interrogations, in which tearful and frightened 14-year-old children are being threatened to the point that they allegedly confess to various offenses. The militias posted the videos on the Internet. Meanwhile, those children are still in prison, their fate is unknown and international human rights organizations do not have access to them. According to human rights organizations, one in four persons imprisoned by the militants has been subjected to violence or has witnessed such violence. Human rights activists point out that sexual violence is being used as part of the torture regime in order to sow panic and fear.

Those facts give an idea of the real situation with regard to human rights, or, more accurately, the lack of such rights, in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. More detailed information on the human rights situation in the occupied territories is very scarce. The Ukrainian authorities do not have accurate statistics, including on gender-based violence, because of the absence of Ukrainian human rights organizations in the territories controlled by the rebels. And they do not allow international human rights organizations to go there, neither the Red Cross, Médecins sans frontières nor United Nations organizations. We have been unable to gather a complete set of evidence on the incidents, including the cases of sexual violence.

In that regard, I want to take this opportunity to reiterate once again, on behalf of Ukraine, our appeal to the United Nations to include in the mandates of the appropriate bodies of the Organization the need to combat sexual violence during the provoked armed conflict in Ukraine and the Crimea. It is very important for us to have not only rhetorical support from the United Nations, but also specific actions by the Organization, so that we can genuinely assess the situation on the ground, and to have the results reflected in the Secretary-General's reports and in further recommendations.

As to specific actions by our country in the context of the problems relating to women and peace and security in the current conditions of foreign aggression against Ukraine and the occupation of part of Ukraine's territory, I would like to say the following. Ukrainian women have rallied to deal with the current situation. Female politicians, social activists, volunteers and human rights activists are working actively to re-establish peace, and their role in dealing with women and peace and security issues is extremely important and ever-growing.

I should also point out that today women make up 12 per cent of the members of the Government and the Parliament of Ukraine. They play a very active role, first and foremost in the peacemaking processes. In February 2016, the Ukrainian Government adopted a national plan of action for implementing resolution 1325 (2000). The implementation of the plan will allow us to ensure even greater participation by women in peacekeeping and decision-making in the field of national security and defence, and in further combating gender-based violence.

The aggression against Ukraine has led to greater involvement by women in the peacemaking processes, and the President of Ukraine has appointed a woman to a position in charge of the peace process in the Donbas region. We also have women in at least two Minsk working groups dealing with humanitarian and political issues, and they are doing everything possible to ensure a peaceful solution to the situation in the Donbas.

But the war has also meant greater involvement by women in the armed forces. Many Ukrainian women voluntarily signed enlistment contracts in order to protect their country against the aggression. We now have 19,892 women in the armed forces of Ukraine, of whom 2,458 are officers and 17,000 are non-commissioned officers or soldiers. Of that group, 266 women were mobilized directly into the ranks of the armed forces. Women also play an important role in providing medical help at the front, and very often they have been active in saving both civilians and our soldiers during the conflict. This year we took a number of special steps to include the gender component in the area of security-sector reform. Although those measures are just at their initial stage — to speak frankly — they have already brought initial results: they have brought about a transformation in the military structures and the military culture.

This past summer we expanded the list of specialities in which women can serve in the armed forces, including in military functions. We need to bring gender advisers into the military. We hope that will be done soon and that the Ukrainian Government will adopt such a measure. We plan to enact broader legal changes so as to eliminate barriers, ensure the equal representation of women in the military and enhance parliamentary oversight of national security and defence.

In order to respond appropriately to violence against women, one of the upcoming steps to be taken by the Parliament is to ratify the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. I believe

that the Parliament in Ukraine will ratify the Istanbul Convention during the current session. The relevant bills have already been introduced in the Parliament, and I hope that Parliament will ratify them this autumn.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that Ukraine wants to further promote the rights of women and ensure their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as to protect women against all forms of violence.