

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium) (spoke in French):

I thank the Uruguayan presidency for convening this debate and for providing us with an opportunity to participate.

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

The fight against sexual violence is a priority for Belgium. We are about to adopt our third national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). The issue of sexual violence against women, including conflict-related violence, is of great importance. For Belgium, accountability is critical in the fight against impunity for crimes of sexual violence. Justice is a prerequisite for building peace and breaking the cycle of conflict. I would like to quickly highlight a few points.

First of all, we welcome the countries mentioned in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/249) that have worked actively to establish a legislative framework and take effective measures. We commend the outstanding work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict in supporting national efforts leading to tangible results — for example, in Guinea.

My delegation therefore wishes to highlight the importance of the Secretary-General's recommendation calling on the Security Council to fully include the issue of conflict-related sexual violence in the work of the sanctions committees. The undeniable legitimacy of the sanctions adopted in that context will indeed lead to strengthened collective efforts in the fight against the scourge.

As for sexual violence in Syria, we believe that the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism recently established by General Assembly resolution 71/248 also plays an important role. The Mechanism aims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes committed in Syria, including, of course, the issue of sexual violence addressed in this debate. In the same vein, allow me to welcome the work of the joint rapid response units and UN-Women and the firm impact of the personnel on the ground in Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi as they seek to ensure justice and accountability.

In addition to the fight against impunity, reintegrating the victims of sexual violence is paramount. Those victims must not become victims a second time because of stigmatization by their families and communities. It is the perpetrators of crimes of sexual violence who should be ashamed, not the victims. It is therefore important to provide socioeconomic and psychosocial support for the victims.

In that regard, I would like to mention, as an example, the excellent work of Dr. Mukwege at Panzi Hospital in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a region where, unfortunately, sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war. Dr. Mukwege's hospital not only provides victims with access to medical care, it provides psychosocial support as well as lawyers to assist victims in obtaining legal redress. Unfortunately, the perpetrators of

sexual violence respond with threats and acts of revenge, as demonstrated by the recent murder of a close collaborator of Dr. Mukwege. We therefore reiterate our call on the Congolese authorities and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take all the measures necessary to protect Dr. Mukwege, his team and his patients.

I cannot end without taking my turn in expressing our appreciation to Ms. Zainab Bangura, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and her team for their outstanding commitment. We welcome the appointment of her successor, Ms. Pramila Patten, and assure her of our full support.