

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (spoke in Spanish):

Bolivia would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency for taking the initiative to hold today's important open debate. We also welcome your presence here today, Mr. President, and that of the Minister of Defence of Sweden, and we are grateful for the briefings by the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Adama Dieng, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and Ms. Mina Jaf, representing civil society.

Today we have heard devastating stories of the experiences of women and girls living in situations of armed conflict. They are victims of sexual violence, rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and sterilization and other forms of sexual abuse. Sexual violence against women represents a denial of their most basic rights, which continue to be abused and violated despite the existence of a framework of international law that should protect them. It is sustained even more by a patriarchal system that takes away women's control of their own sexuality and reproductive rights. Sexual violence against women is a dreadful expression of a patriarchal system intensified by conflict situations and that, as has been said, tightens its grip when women and children are targeted physically or mentally, deprived of their dignity and used as shields in war or armed conflict, making it impossible to effectively consolidate international peace and security.

Given the nature of crimes such as these that have consequences for security, as well as the fear or shame that can prevent them from being reported or condemned, it is difficult to estimate the numbers of victims of sexual violence in conflict. However, in many cases the figures are alarming. For example, according to the Outreach Programme on the Rwanda Genocide and the United Nations, between 100,000 and 150,000 women were raped during the Rwanda genocide. According to the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2017/249) on conflict-related sexual violence, such acts were reported in 19 countries. We also have data from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, published in 2016, showing that more than 15 million refugees and 36 million internally displaced persons were recorded, and from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs showing that women and children make up 80 per cent of the displaced population of countries in conflict.

The current situation has certainly not improved. Given its complexity, we feel it is important to focus on five fundamental areas, the first of which is prevention, followed by the right to truth, the right to justice, the right to reparation and to the knowledge that such abuses will not be repeated. With regard to prevention, I would like to cite the Secretary-General's report, which states that "the prevention of sexual violence is an integral part of wider conflict prevention and ... is not merely a priority, but the priority." (S/2017/249, para. 4)

Where security is concerned, I would like to echo the words of Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, outgoing Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, who said in the 2014 annual report (S/2014/181) that in South Sudan women had to choose between feeding their families or being attacked by armed men when they were out harvesting in the fields.

Such cases arise in other conflict-affected areas as well, which is why we must work to strengthen existing mechanisms that can help provide women and girls with effective security, whatever their circumstances and wherever and whenever they occur. In that regard, the relationship between sexual violence and trafficking in persons and the reference to that in resolution 1325 (2000) are very important, demonstrating the link between them and also between terrorism and transnational organized crime. According to the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016 of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 79 per cent of the victims of human trafficking are women and children. Terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram, among others, use sexual violence not only as a weapon of war but also as a method for financing their activities. In that regard, we must combat the flows of illicit funds from sexual exploitation and forced prostitution.

With regard to the implementation of international standards, we urge all countries to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which is the most appropriate mechanism for combating crimes related to sexual violence, because it recognizes that they constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity and, in some cases, acts of genocide. It is also important to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010). Their implementation would enable the Office of the Special Representative to have a reliable system for monitoring, analysing and providing information on sexual violence in conflict, tools that can help to facilitate dialogue between parties to conflicts in order to help them protect civilians and develop a comprehensive strategy for combating sexual violence.

Lastly, if we are to see sustainable and lasting peace prevail, the perpetrators of sexual violence must not go unpunished at any time or at any level. Such acts must not be considered an inevitable consequence of war. While we cannot necessarily stop people going to war, we must work to adhere to international law and to condemn unilateral action, interventionism and policies of regime change, which are some of the factors that provoke conflict and must be halted if we are to avoid the tragic consequences that can arise not just for women and girls but for the whole of humankind.

