

**Mr. Mendoza-García (Costa Rica) (spoke in Spanish):**

Costa Rica wishes to thank the Uruguayan presidency and Vice-Chancellor Cancela for convening today's open debate on this relevant topic. We also thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the other speakers for their briefings.

It is important to reiterate that sexual violence is always unacceptable. However, its widespread use as a terrorist tactic and a weapon of war and terrorism remains of particular concern because it is one of the most cruel and terrifying forms of social coercion, especially when used as a strategy to control and intimidate entire communities and undermine the dignity and autonomy of people at their deepest levels. Equally alarming are the growing restrictions on the rights of women and girls being promoted by extremist groups, the control and restriction of these rights having become a fundamental element of conflict and the pretext for terrorist acts being specifically directed against women and girls.

Furthermore, sexual violence perpetuates conflict and weakens security and stability, hampering the ability of people to participate in the political, social and economic life of their societies. The United Nations, as an organization, and we, as the international community, have a great debt to pay on this issue, having failed to address the causes of violence and sexual abuse through preventive measures, on the one hand, and to eliminate impunity in these cases, on the other. As States, we have the primary responsibility of protecting our populations. As States, we must establish robust legal and institutional frameworks that lay firm foundations for preventing and addressing existing gaps in the protection of victims, especially women and girls. It is also extremely important to expand the scope of measures to protect the most vulnerable populations, such as ethnic and religious minorities, women in rural areas, women and girls associated with armed groups, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex population, and boys and men, who are also vulnerable to sexual violence — and whose prevalence is increasing.

We must use all measures at our disposal to get parties to conflicts, whether they be State or non-State actors, to comply with international law, urging States to punish all acts of sexual violence with the utmost vigour, including the referral of cases to the International Criminal Court, thereby eliminating impunity in such cases. We consider these acts of violence to be crimes against humanity and we will continue to advocate for zero tolerance for those who commit, order or condone sexual violence in conflict. We firmly believe that accountability and the use of existing international legal mechanisms to the greatest possible extent are vital tools for ensuring justice for victims. They also deter the future commission of crimes.

It is also crucial to implement Security Council resolutions, which outline commitments and strategies for preventing sexual violence in conflicts and provide for the monitoring of their implementation. Likewise, it is essential to work closely with the relevant sanctions committees to make sexual violence in the context of armed conflict and terrorism a criterion for being subject to sanctions. All those involved in the financing, planning, or supporting of armed groups with links to acts of sexual violence should qualify for inclusion within existing sanctions regimes. If this approach is to be effective, key actors must collaborate in the monitoring of these cases. The Office of the Special Representative of the

Secretary-General also plays an important role in this regard, ensuring smooth communication and information exchange.

Prevention is key. Proper training on gender issues with a special focus on prevention and the systematic inclusion of women's protection advisers in the strategic planning processes of political missions and peace operations are necessary. Adequate training on gender issues is also required to help prevent or, in the worst-case scenario, adequately respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and the trafficking in persons in conflict areas. If all this is to work, programmes aimed at achieving these ends must be adequately funded.

It is extremely important to ensure that all these efforts are victim-centred. Sexual and reproductive health services should be made available to all. Similarly, support programmes must be set up to adequately reintegrate victims into their social structures, which will help restore the social fabric of populations affected by armed conflict and its consequences.

Legal frameworks must be established at the national level in order to protect victims — for example, through legislation that provides legal status to children born of rape and to combat the stigma associated with sexual abuse and violence — and to offer them reparations and compensation, keeping in mind that different forms of sexual violence call for different responses and solutions.

Finally, it is extremely important to involve women and girls in decision-making processes and in leadership positions, as it is to promote a gender perspective at all levels of participation. It is also key to ensure equal opportunity, access to education and the economic, political and social empowerment of women, with a view to enabling women and girls to assume a major, transformative role within their communities both during and post-conflict.