

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia):

I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting on a very important subject that impacts the lives of too many people, in particular women and children, in conflicts that are already horrendous in so many ways.

Estonia aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women and Peace and Security.

This is not just another debate or another issue on our agenda. The urgency of tackling conflict-related sexual violence cannot be emphasized enough. It is the responsibility of all States to combat impunity and enforce accountability by prosecuting those responsible for such dreadful crimes against civilians. There must be no room for impunity for sexual or gender-based crimes. However, today only a limited number of the perpetrators of sexual violence have been brought to justice. A lack of accountability for these crimes undermines international peace and security and hampers post-conflict peacebuilding. We therefore welcome the recommendation of the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2017/249) that the Security Council should influence State and non-State actors in conflict zones to comply with international law, including by referring matters to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Furthermore, it is important to take full advantage of the existing tools and mechanisms and to continue to include sexual violence as a part of the designation criteria for sanctions. In addition, we urge the countries experiencing conflict-related sexual violence to reach out and learn from the cases where the issue has been tackled successfully, such as in Côte d'Ivoire. Those examples show that, with a strong will and the support of the United Nations and the international community, good results can be achieved in a timely manner.

However, in order to bring perpetrators to justice, it is crucial that the victims of conflict-related sexual violence report such cases and not be held back by fear, shame or stigma. That once more serves to emphasize the importance of awareness-raising and changing social norms and mindsets. Victims of sexual violence must be assisted with legal, medical and other relevant services to avoid their expulsion from communities and to prevent double victimization.

Every country can make a difference in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. Estonia has taken steps at both the national and international levels. At the global level, we have supported the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and made regular contributions to the ICC Trust Fund for Victims. Likewise, Estonia has supported the fight against conflict-related sexual violence through the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict.

At the national level, Estonia has made important progress with regard to the fight against violence against women and sexual abuse of children. For example, victims of human trafficking, unaccompanied under-age foreigners and sexually abused minors have the right to receive counselling services and psychological help. Furthermore, Estonia considers it important to address sexual violence in conflict as a part of the broader women and peace and security agenda. We have therefore incorporated the subject of human trafficking and gender-based violence into all our pre-mission trainings.

Regardless of our common efforts and achievements, much work remains to be done in the fight against conflict-related sexual violence. Estonia hopes that the topic will remain high on our agenda and calls for comprehensive cooperation by all Member States to combat crimes against humanity.