

Mrs. Jakubonė (Lithuania):

We thank the Uruguayan presidency for convening this open debate on an issue that plagues and exacerbates many contemporary conflicts.

At the outset, we sincerely commend Ms. Zainab Bangura for her hard work and dedication as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict over the past few years. We also congratulate Ms. Pramila Patten on her recent appointment and we wish her success. I also thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the other briefers — Mr. Dieng and Ms. Jaf — for their critical contributions and testimonies.

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

Almost a decade has passed since the Security Council recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war. Despite all the efforts of the international community, conflict-related sexual violence remains an acute issue. It is becoming more complex, with ever-increasing violent extremism and terrorism, displacement driven by conflict, mass migration and human trafficking, abduction and rape, forced marriage and pregnancy, enslavement and the use of girls as suicide bombers. These are not isolated crimes, but a tactic of terrorism employed by State and non-State actors alike and aimed at achieving strategic objectives, including financing and recruitment, displacement, destruction and persecution. The only way to effectively address the scourge is a comprehensive and integrated approach that entails prevention, early warning, justice and accountability, the participation of women in political processes and their political, social and economic empowerment.

We all agree that the responsibility to protect the civilian population from gender-based and sexual violence in conflict lies with States. To that end, having an adequate judiciary and penal framework is essential, as is making sure that national civilian and military justice systems fully meet international standards. Most conflict-affected countries, however, lack the adequate national capacity and expertise to prevent, investigate and prosecute sexual violence.

In that regard, we greatly value the work of the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict in providing assistance to Governments by strengthening their capacity, including in the areas of criminal investigation and prosecution, military justice, legislative reform, the protection of victims and witnesses and reparations for survivors. We commend the partnership between the Justice Rapid Response initiative and UN-Women. The deployment of justice experts from their joint roster in 50 different missions greatly contributes to ending impunity for perpetrators.

Where action at a national level is not yet possible, international justice mechanisms can play a critical role, including the International Criminal Court. The Security Council's targeted sanctions are another tool that could be more widely used to deter sexual violence in conflict and to seek accountability. Sexual and gender-based violence should be systematically applied as designation criteria when adopting or renewing targeted sanctions in situations of armed conflict. Moreover, the Council should be more vocal and systematic in its

condemnation of conflict-related sexual violence and demands for credible investigations into all allegations of sexual violence committed in conflict zones — for Government-affiliated forces, armed groups or the United Nations own peacekeepers.

On the protection side, increased numbers of women peacekeepers, the deployment of women's protection and gender advisers, as well as human rights and gender-awareness training, have all proved to be successful and should be further expanded. At the national, regional and subregional levels, cooperation mechanisms should continue to actively promote effective responses to conflict-related sexual crimes, including through awareness campaigns, action plans and cooperation frameworks, capacity-building and shared good practices.

Care for and the protection of survivors of sexual violence is another vital issue to address. Overcoming trauma and restoring their dignity are crucial aspects in stopping the vicious cycle of stigmatization and further abuse. Victims must have access to justice, accountability and redress mechanisms in order to ensure their reintegration into their respective societies. In conclusion, we have to acknowledge that violence in conflict is rooted in violence during times of peace. Gender inequalities, discriminatory cultural norms and patriarchal gender stereotypes often reinforce misogyny and crimes against women and girls. Therefore, it is incumbent upon all Member States to redouble their efforts to implement Sustainable Development Goal 5, on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls to become actors rather than victims in their societies, which will contribute to breaking the cycles of violence. Making a difference requires the full integration and mainstreaming of a gender perspective into the Council's — and the whole of the United Nations — work with coherent, consistent and credible actions at all levels.