

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan):

My delegation welcomes today's open debate. Sexual violence is among the most egregious crimes in armed conflict and disproportionately affects women and girls. For far too long, sexual violence has been seen as an unfortunate and inevitable reality of conflict. For much too long, humankind has stood on the sidelines, seeking justification for its collective inaction in an evasive sense of fatalism. But as conflict situations across the world have so tellingly shown, the exploitation of women and girls is not an incidental byproduct of conflict but an instrument widely employed to humiliate and terrorize civilians. For its survivors, the scars of sexual abuse are often indelible and enduring, extending well beyond the limits of their physical and physiological suffering. Social stigma and marginalization further complicate any attempts to seek closure.

Within the ambit of its agenda on women and peace and security, the Security Council has led global efforts to end this dehumanizing practice. Its landmark resolution 1325 (2000) both ushered in and institutionalized a new focus on gender in conflict, moving women's participation and rights to the forefront of the political debate. Subsequent Council resolutions have built on this momentum by recognizing sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to international peace and security, and developing measures to respond to and prevent such occurrences.

The progress achieved thus far, however, has been both uneven and varied. As the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/249) shows, women and girls continue to serve as a form of currency in the political economy of war. The world has watched in horror as several State and non-State actors have employed rape and sexual abuse as a deliberate policy to subdue and suppress entire populations. We see this in Pakistan's neighbourhood as well. Unfortunately, those who commit and condone sexual violence are often not fully held to account.

The critical challenge for the international community now is to convert political will into practical action and drive real change on the ground. The effectiveness of our collective action will depend on an inclusive, broad-based and comprehensive approach. The top priority should be to combat impunity for these crimes. We must redirect the stigma and the consequences of sexual violence from the survivors to the perpetrators of such acts. As prosecution is critical to prevention, emphasis should in particular be placed on strengthening and enhancing the capacity of national institutions and criminal justice systems in countries facing armed conflict.

Secondly, attention must also be placed on providing support to the victims of sexual violence. Justice means not only punishment for the perpetrators but also redress for the survivors. Survivors need not only financial compensation but also access to health care, social services and legal support. They must also be given assistance to reintegrate into society.

Thirdly, the plight of migrant women and girls requires special attention. We must ensure that in their quest for protection and safety, these victims of conflict do not fall prey to human

trafficking and abuse. We therefore support the Secretary-General's recommendation that conflict-related sexual violence be considered grounds for asylum.

Fourthly, the gender perspective should be fully integrated into the peacebuilding paradigm to reinforce the protection environment. This would entail not only the greater participation of women in peacekeeping mandates, but also an enhanced role for women in peace accords, stabilization and the reconstruction phases of post-conflict rehabilitation.

Finally, the best way to eliminate conflict-related sexual violence is to prevent and resolve conflicts in the first place. We believe that the Secretary-General's emphasis on conflict prevention as the core of the global peace and security paradigm neatly dovetails with that approach.

Multidimensional peacekeeping missions with protection mandates play a key role in combating violence against women in conflict and post-conflict situations. As a leading troop-contributing country, Pakistan remains committed to this cause. For my country, the protection of the vulnerable, including women and children, is not only a global peace and security concern but an obligation of humanity.