

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian):

We would like to thank the briefers for their participation in today's meeting and for their contributions to the discussion. We note with appreciation the work of Ms. Zainab Bangura, who recently completed her term as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and her commitment to eradicating that evil. We would also like to wish the newly appointed Special Representative, Ms. Pramila Patten, every success.

We consider the problem of sexual violence in conflict to be an urgent one chiefly in situations where it is a major aspect of a conflict in the context of the protection of civilians. At the same time, we should avoid attempts to artificially link sexual violence with the maintenance of international peace and security and conflict prevention. In our view, there is no convincing evidence that sexual violence is an underlying cause of armed conflict. Rather, what we are talking about here is a repulsive consequence of it.

We have studied the 2016 report (S/2017/249) of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence, which includes interim conclusions of the work of the United Nations in that area. We support the conclusion about the importance of strengthening the national potential for preventing sexual violence in conflict and ensuring accountability for it. It is only through cooperation with the Governments of States that are in a situation of armed conflict and by ensuring that their sovereignty is respected that we can achieve real progress in the fight against sexual violence. No less important is a similar dialogue involving, for instance, religious and other traditional leaders, with regard to the issue of the stigmatization of victims of sexual violence, their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

We are of course concerned about the information concerning the ongoing sexual violence by members of terrorist groups, in particular in Syria and Iraq. We strongly condemn such criminal practices. We call upon States to more actively cooperate in destroying the shadow economy of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIL), which receives an income, inter alia, from human trafficking, sexual slavery and forced prostitution. None of those crimes should remain unpunished. Their effective documentation and investigation is something that lies primarily within the purview of the relevant authorities. As for the establishment, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, of a so-called investigative mechanism in Syria, which the report mentions, the position of our delegation on that matter is very well known.

This is not the first time that we have to dwell on the issue of the terminology used — and that is not merely a point of academic interest. The issue is that a change of concepts could have significant practical consequences. Our delegation has repeatedly drawn attention to attempts to broaden the scope of the work of the Security Council in the area of combating sexual violence in conflict, including in connection with the use of the term “conflict-related sexual violence” in the most recent report. In our opinion, such seemingly technical changes are in fact fraught with the possibility of infringing upon the mandates of the Security Council and interfering in the terms of reference of other United Nations bodies or States. We need to very clearly distinguish sexual violence as a war crime from sexual violence as a criminal act not having anything to do with the parties to a conflict. We think that the Security Council

should be dealing with the issue of sexual violence when it is directly related to an armed conflict in a situation that is on the agenda of the Security Council.

In both the concept note (S/2017/402, annex) for today's meeting and in the report (S/2017/249) of the Secretary-General, the issue of sexual violence has very rightly been underscored because of the atrocities being perpetrated by ISIL, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and the Al-Nusra Front. However, for some reason, mention is made of some "groups of extremists" or "violent extremist groups". We would like to underscore yet again that these and similar terrorists entities need to be called "terrorists"; otherwise, it can lead to lowering the level of gravity of the crimes and to double standards in the fight against terrorism, which is unacceptable. It is for the purpose of fighting acts of terrorism that we have in place a framework of international instruments, including international conventions and Security Council resolutions. Let us not create any ambiguity here. We call upon everyone to take that into account when the next set of documents is prepared on this and other topics.

There is another trend that I want to mention and that has become increasingly obvious recently. Frequently, sexual violence is being considered as a violation of human rights, and that is of course true. However, in the context of an armed conflict, we need to be talking first and foremost about international humanitarian law, which requires not only Government bodies and agents but also the non-State participants in armed conflicts, to make sure that the norms and standards against sexual violence are being abided by and so that all participants bear responsibility for violations of those norms.

Such a softening of emphasis could weaken the existing framework in place for protecting civilians, as well as the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict. It could also lead to duplication of work within the United Nations. The preparation of reports on that issue is being undertaken by entities that do not have the requisite competence, nor enough knowledge, in the area of methodology or the substance of the issue. To cite an example, the recent report of United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine on sexual violence related to the conflict in Ukraine is guilty of unprofessionalism and mixing things up. And, as the delegation of the Ukraine yet again has voiced its unjustified complaints about Russia and referred to that report, let me say that it also contains much data on many cases of beatings and torture, including through electric shock, of threats of rape, disrobing and other crimes against men and women who have been deprived of liberty by Government forces. We can also provide other sources for similar information. We will refrain from providing Council members with quotes, as that would take up too much time.

Next month, for the third time, the international community will celebrate the International Day of Fighting Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict. It was established to demonstrate the resolve and unity of States to try to put an end to that criminal practice.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our readiness to cooperate in this area in the framework of the Council, on the basis of the resolutions adopted on the topic.

