

Mr. Barro (Senegal) (spoke in French):

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude for the very informative briefings by Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Mr. Adama Dieng, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. I would also especially like to thank Ms. Mina Jaf for her touching briefing, by which we have gained knowledge of the situation on the ground. I would also like to thank the delegation of Uruguay for organizing this open debate, as well as for its concept note on such an important issue as sexual violence in armed conflicts.

As Ms. Zainab Bangura stated here in the Council, “[s]exual violence destroys the individual human person, undermines the prospects for peace and development and casts a shadow over our collective humanity”.

Allow me to pay well-deserved tribute to Ms. Bangura for the valuable support she has always provided to victims of sexual violence in the performance of her duties as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict over the past five years. We wish her successor, Ms. Pramila Patten, every success in her new role and assure her of our full support in eradicating this crime, which sees women only as war booty or a means of altering the ethnic nature of peoples.

Given the psychological impact that sexual violence has on the victims as well as its harmful consequences on security, we believe that success in the fight against sexual violence necessarily requires that we prevent conflicts in the first place. It also means protecting civilians, extending assistance to the many survivors of this phenomenon and, finally, the necessary accountability.

For decades, even centuries, victims of sexual violence in conflict have often been deprived of the mere right to justice, and societies have been slow to criminalize such acts or to provide victims with the necessary psychological and/or medical care. Today, however, we are pleased to note that the Security Council has taken on this issue head-on, including over the past decade by adopting standards aimed specifically at enforcing international human rights law with regard to women’s rights. Nevertheless, as the Secretary-General’s latest report (S/2017/249) highlights, our collective conscious is ever-more alarmed by disturbing phenomena such as the increase in violent extremism and terrorism, mass migration, trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation and making women part of the economy in situations of armed conflict. Taking into account those new scourges, I would like to focus my statement today on three points that seem to me to be very relevant in our common struggle against the consequences of this crime.

First, with regard to preventing crimes of sexual violence, we all agree that preventing sexual violence is an integral part of conflict prevention in the broader sense. It is not simply a priority, it is the priority, as clearly stated by the Secretary-General General in his very first speech in this Chamber. Preventing sexual violence must begin with implementing the

relevant legal provisions set out in international legal instruments and by including prevention mechanisms for this crime in peace agreements and ceasefire arrangements. There is also a need to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to ensure the prevention of sexual violence, including through training, awareness-raising and appropriate legal measures. In the context of prevention, it is also essential that we work with women's groups and with traditional and religious leaders, who can play an important role in putting in place strategic communications. However, we must bear in mind that suppression is equally essential to prevention, in that it discourages potential aggressors from actually carrying out such acts, helps to restore confidence in the rule of law and shows that no political or military leader and no man, woman or child is above the law.

The second point I would like to highlight is the need to improve protection for civilians and support for victims of sexual violence. In that connection, I welcome the increasing number of protection-of-civilians mandates included in United Nations missions. From the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone in 1999 to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali in 2013 — to mention only that period — United Nations peacekeepers have committed themselves, even at the cost of their lives, to an undertaking that is as perilous as it is necessary. I would like here to pay a resounding tribute to them for their service to humankind as a whole. We must safeguard their considerable achievements by making sure that the actions carried out by a small number do not tarnish the reputation of generations of courageous and principled men and women. In that connection, my delegation welcomes and fully supports zero-tolerance policy of the Secretary-General to combat this phenomenon in the ranks of Blue Helmets. In the same spirit, we must appropriately address incidents committed by non-State actors, who are often responsible for such crimes in situations where there are wide-scale attacks of sexual violence. They, too, must not escape the full extent of the law.

Above and beyond the security afforded by peacekeeping operations, women victims also need assistance — in particular psychological assistance. In that regard, we agree that cases of sexual violence must first and foremost be treated with the strictest confidence, given that fear of reprisal or further violence can impede victims from coming forward. Moreover, given that sexual violence also constitutes a medical emergency, it is essential that victims have swift and unimpeded access to quality health services. In addition to those psychological and medical considerations, however, human and financial resources commensurate with the scope of the task at hand will be needed to undertake a coherent response aimed at bolstering quick-response measures in the face of a crime that has long been the subject of silence. It is also necessary to put in place a strategic framework aimed at prioritizing the rights and dignity of victims, end impunity and ensure that monitoring, control and prevention measures are in place against sexual exploitation and abuse. Nevertheless, greater efforts are needed at all levels to make sure that survivors have access to the full range of subsistence, medical and legal services without discrimination.

Thirdly, and lastly, I would like to address the need to hold the perpetrators of these acts accountable and to make sure that victims have access to justice. The first concern to take into consideration in that regard is to ensure that peace agreements and ceasefire arrangements explicitly reflect the concerns associated with sexual violence. That is crucial if

we want to make sure that survivors have access to the necessary services and reparations in post-conflict situations, as well to remove the perpetrators of this violence from their positions and ensure that they are held accountable for their actions. As a subsequent step, we will have to work to further the fight against stigmatization and marginalization of survivors, the consequences of which are often fatal. Besides, such stigmatization serves only to worsen their marginalization while hindering their full acceptance and reintegration. Society, including traditional and religious leaders, must also help survivors. We must convey the unequivocal message that it is the perpetrators who should be shamed, not the victims.

I cannot conclude without stressing the importance of certain prerequisites in support of the whole process of combating sexual violence in a context of armed conflict and the restoration of lasting peace. The first is expanding the inclusion of women at every level of peace and mediation negotiations. Their experience as the main victims of such crimes is far too valuable to ignore. Their participation in peacekeeping missions, as well as in our countries' armed forces and police, should therefore be increased.

Lastly, my delegation believes firmly that the effective and transparent investigation and documentation of reported cases of sexual violence in armed conflict would help to ensure victims' access to impartial justice, and we must persist in affirming our determination in that regard. For Senegal, all of that means that we will never defeat sexual violence until our will to combat it, the will of the members of the international community, overcomes the will of warlords to use it.