

Mrs. Rugwabiza (Rwanda):

I thank you very much, Mr. President, and your delegation for organizing this important open debate. I also thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Mr. Adama Dieng for their briefings. We hope that today's debate will contribute to enhancing collective action against this war crime, given the alarmingly growing number of conflicts where sexual violence is used as a weapon of war and terrorism against civilian populations.

Sexual and gender-based violence is not inevitable. Preventing and protecting against mass atrocities, including sexual violence, is a fundamental State responsibility. As Member States, it is indeed our responsibility to put in place the necessary normative and legal framework, as well as enforcement measures, to ensure zero tolerance for sexual violence in both times of peace and war. However, as we all know, the first rule to be broken during times of conflict is the rule of law. It is therefore our collective responsibility to ensure the protection of those targeted by sexual violence and most in need of protection during conflicts.

As situations of conflict continue to worsen in many places and women and children continue to be the main target of sexual violence, we believe that all United Nations peacekeeping missions should have a robust mandate to protect civilians. The Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, to which many members in the Chamber are signatory, are an effective guide to that end. Protecting those in need should be given priority by ensuring that we take all measures to provide more effective protection to the civilian populations, that we facilitate humanitarian assistance and that we allow investigation in cases of violation and abuse. Rwanda is happy to meet the minimum target of 15 per cent of all deployed peacekeeping contingents being female. We mention that specifically because we think that increasing the numbers of women in peacekeeping will go a long way in helping us to ensure the fight against violence.

Rwanda believes that Member States should systematically train all peacekeepers to address gender issues, prevent sexual violence and protect individuals, including women and girls. Rwanda has operationalized a curriculum for all of our troops and police in predeployment training that includes lessons on sexual exploitation and abuse. In the same vein, we call upon all Member States to boost women's participation in all contingents and units. More specifically, we call upon Member States to include gender advisers and female officers and an increased presence for female peacekeeping personnel in general.

Sexual violence in conflict is a crime that we can eradicate. We strongly believe that our joint efforts can yield tangible results through a combination of preventive and responsive measures, including targeted sanctions against all categories of perpetrators, monitoring and systematic reporting, assistance for victims, the empowerment of women and girls, increased numbers of female peacekeepers and advisers and training for all forces. That will go a long way in contributing to creating an environment of zero tolerance for sexual violence as a weapon of war.

We will continue to extend our support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict in implementing her mandate.

