

**Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom):**

I thank you, Mr. Minister, for convening and presiding over this important open debate. Let me begin by welcoming both Mina Jaf and Adama Dieng back to the Council and to thank them for their very important briefings this morning. I would like to pay particular tribute to Ms. Jaf for sharing her powerful testimony with us and for bringing the unique and valuable perspective of civil society into the Security Council Chamber. It is a perspective that we need to hear more often. The Council works best when its members are informed by the women and men most affected by the issues that we discuss in the Chamber. And sexual violence in conflict is no exception to that.

As we heard today, ending sexual violence is central to peacebuilding, conflict prevention and reconciliation. That is a message that should not need repeating in the Council. We have heard it many times before on our visits to South Sudan, the Lake Chad basin and, most recently, Colombia.

We can also not forget the stories that we heard in that dusty camp of internally displaced persons in northern Nigeria: stories of women whose daughters had been abducted by Boko Haram, most likely forced into marriage and sexual slavery. And yet, as the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/361) clearly shows, those messages are not getting through. Not enough is being done. Women and girls, men and boys, are still being subjected to sexual violence every day: in Mali, where survivors are forced to withdraw complaints so that the perpetrators can escape justice; in Syria, where not a single person has been prosecuted for Da'esh's vile acts; and in South Sudan, where we see the continuing abhorrent use of rape as a sickening means of punishing communities.

We know what needs to happen. We need to make ending sexual violence a key part of ceasefire deals. We need fewer women at kitchen tables and more women at negotiating tables. And we need even more women serving in uniform, because for too many survivors a man in uniform is someone to fear, not someone to trust. That is a lesson that needs to be heeded by Governments, by armed forces and, yes, by the United Nations and its peacekeepers too.

We cannot, however, be deterred. We must all play our part and do everything within our power to ensure that those crimes are reported, that survivors are cared for and that perpetrators, whether terrorists or State actors, are held to account. That is why the United Kingdom, in partnership with the United Nations Team of Experts and Justice Rapid Response, is carrying out a campaign to tackle the stigma that so often surrounds the survivors of sexual violence. It is why we worked with over 200 civil society experts to produce the international protocol that helps document those crimes. And it is why we are now developing the principles for global action to be launched at the General Assembly later this year. This is a new tool, developed, again, with civil society, but also with United Nations

agencies and Member States, to help policymakers and international organizations tackle stigma through their own work.

Ultimately, if we want to address the appalling use of sexual violence by — and, indeed, by State actors — we need to look “bigger”; we need to look broader. We need to recognize that terrorists and State actors are enabled to carry out those sick acts when peace and security have broken down and when the Council has failed to uphold its duties enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. What happens in the Council, whether votes in favour or vetoes against, has a very real bearing on that insecurity. Let us then make sure that tackling sexual violence is not something that we talk about only once a year at this debate, but in every single Security Council item where it is relevant, starting with the upcoming Al-Qaida sanctions regime review.

Nor can we shy away from the fact that such appalling acts are the direct results of gender discrimination and inequality. Until women are treated equally, paid equally and respected equally, we will have failed, not just to address this issue but also to deliver the global goals that we all agreed less than two years ago.

I would like to conclude by paying tribute to former Special Representative Zainab Bangura for all her tireless efforts and exemplary leadership on this important issue. I wish her the best for the future, and I look forward to working with her successor, Pramila Patten.