

**Security Council**

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*Provisional***Statement by the Representative of The United States, Ms. Eckels-Currie:**

I thank Deputy Secretary-General Mohammed, Special Representative Patten and Ms. Sultana for their briefings today. The report of the Secretary-General on the rising levels of conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250) is chilling. We welcome the discussion today and hope that it serves as an impetus for the Security Council to take concrete steps to both ensure justice for survivors and help prevent these crimes from occurring. I thank the President for convening today's meeting. We should all be appalled at the level of sexual violence taking place in conflicts around the world.

In war zone after war zone, horrific violence against women is not an unfortunate by-product of conflict but a weapon of conflict. As the Secretary-General's report details, and as Ms. Sultana describes in horrible detail, in Burma, as we speak, the military is using sexual violence as a tool for ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya and for terrorizing other ethnic communities across the country with impunity. And what does that mean? It means using mass rape, sexual exploitation and sexual slavery of women and girls — girls as young as 12 or 13 — to drive groups of people out of their homes. It means using the terror, stigma and shame of rape to drive families from their country, often from the only place they have ever known.

As the mother of a precious nine-year-old girl, I find the horror of these crimes unfathomable. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sexual violence is a common tactic used by armed groups to punish and humiliate people allied with their enemies. Women and girls are the battlefield on which conflict is waged. A staggering 27 per cent of Congolese women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. And let us all understand why women have been targeted in so many conflicts. It is because violence against women is violence against families, and violence against families is violence against whole communities. Survivors are stigmatized and isolated, families and communities are ripped apart, and entire generations are left less able to find peace and to reconcile with their communities.

Sexual violence is the poisoned root of societies that are suffering endless conflict, poverty and dislocation. It is for this reason that we welcome today's debate. When we recognize the role of sexual violence in conflict, we recognize the link between human rights and conflict.

The United States has long urged the Security Council to address human rights as an issue of peace and security. Debates like the one we are having S/PV.8234 Women and peace and today do that in a powerful and undeniable way. This linkage should be apparent to anyone who has spent any time in

conflict zones or the refugee camps that house the survivors. The sexual violence those survivors experienced is not random; it is calculated and designed to inflict punishment and fear on a community.

Tragically, we could go on all day about the different aspects of this problem around the world, but we are here to discuss solutions. The Council has sanctions tools at its disposal to punish these heinous actors around the world, but unfortunately they are terribly underutilized. For example, last year former Special Representative Bangura proposed names to the Council of perpetrators who should be held accountable for their crimes, but nothing has been done. It is now time for the Council to use these tools to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. It is now time to end impunity for these criminals and show survivors and the rest of the world that the international community will respond.

It is now time that Member States actively develop sanctions designations for perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict. We can also designate criminals operating in conflict zones where we already have United Nations sanctions regimes in place. Taking those steps will not only end impunity for sexual violence and conflict; it will also help to deter future abuses. The United Nations also has a role to play in countering violence against women in the field through our peacekeeping missions. Women talk to each other, and, more importantly, they understand each other.

We should capitalize on this fundamental truth and do a better job of recruiting and including more women in peacekeeping. Unfortunately, only 4 per cent of uniformed peacekeepers are women. That number is even smaller in the most dangerous missions, where women are suffering the most. Deploying more women peacekeepers will provide valuable insights that male peacekeepers often cannot obtain. However, it is not just about numbers. It is also about the roles that women peacekeepers take on. Women peacekeepers should be encouraged and empowered to engage with local communities and bring value to the work of their missions.

Additionally, research shows that female participation improves dispute resolution. Women need to be at the table during peace negotiations. The United Nations should strive to include female representation in negotiating bodies and mediating teams.

Finally, the United Nations should ensure that all peacekeeping training centres around the world include training to involve women in prevention and peacebuilding efforts. Without understanding the concerns of half of the population, conflict can never be resolved. Sexual violence primarily affects women, but at its heart it is an issue of human dignity. And it is an issue of how violations of human dignity — the denial of human dignity — have an impact on peace and security. As such, it is a vital issue of concern for the Security Council. I thank the President once again for arranging today's debate