

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine):

Ukraine appreciates Uruguay's initiative in holding this very important open debate. We also appreciate the fact that you, Sir, are presiding over the debate, and we welcome you back to the United Nations. We would also like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for her introduction. We are equally grateful to the other two briefers for their valuable insights, especially the civil-society perspective. I am also pleased to recognize the participation of the Minister for Defence of Sweden.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Pramila Patten on her appointment as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We wish her every success. Ukraine also reiterates its full support for that important mandate and the work of the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. Ukraine also reaffirms its firm backing of the zero-tolerance policy regarding all forms of sexual violence and stands in solidarity with the victims and survivors of such crimes.

While my delegation aligns itself with the statement of the European Union to be delivered later today, I would like to make a number of points in my national capacity.

In conflicts around the world women and girls, as well as men and boys, are subjected to horrendous acts of sexual violence. Those acts — rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage and sexual torture — constitute abhorrent violations of human rights and human dignity. Yet, as the Secretary-General's recent thematic report (S/2017/249) states, their scope remains at an alarming level.

The pervasive nature of this horrible phenomenon makes it imperative for us, the international community, to double down on fighting the scourge. Designing prevention policies, ensuring accountability for perpetrators and providing adequate support and rehabilitation for victims must be part and parcel of any conflict-resolution endeavour.

In that light Ukraine, as the country that pioneered the issue of prevention and initiated the relevant process in the Human Rights Council, fully supports the Secretary-General's approach that "[t]he prevention of sexual violence is an integral part of wider conflict prevention" (S/2017/249, para. 4).

We also strongly believe that accountability for sexual violence in conflict is needed not only in order to meet the demand for justice, but also to help societies in breaking the cycles of conflict. Perpetrators of sexual violence must, without any regard for their affiliation or rank, be brought to account.

In situations where the justice sector is ill-functioning, survivors who have gone through the trauma of sexual assault too often face additional risks, such as rejection by their families and communities, double victimization by State authorities, limited access to health services and so on. The list, unfortunately, is too long. We must not let them experience all of that. What is also badly needed is a fully integrated approach aimed at addressing deeply rooted gender inequalities, as sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations is reflective of broader, unequal gender relations in the societies concerned.

In violent conflict, rape is frequently used to harm, humiliate and shame. As already noted, sexual violence is unique in that it often stigmatizes the victim, rather than the perpetrator of the outrage. Owing to that and other factors, such crimes remain significantly underreported. It is known, thanks to the United Nations, that for each rape reported in connection with conflict, 10 to 20 cases will likely remain undocumented. We should work to break that shameful trend.

Social- and economic-reintegration support for the victims is imperative. Children born of rape need particular attention. We must also support men and boys who have suffered sexual violence and live with life-long traumas. The needs of survivors should therefore be addressed across legal, psychological, social, medical and other vital spheres.

Unfortunately, Ukraine is also affected by conflict as a result of the ongoing Russian aggression. Among other serious consequences, we have seen an increase in cases of sexual violence. That has been reported in particular in the 37-page thematic report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine, which I have here.

According to the report, in the territory controlled by armed groups supported by Russia, sexual violence is used to compel people in detention to hand over property. Performing sex acts is also often an explicit condition for being set free. The report includes specific recommendations to the Government of Ukraine, illegal armed groups and the Russian Federation, as well as the international community, aimed at preventing sexual violence, improving response and ensuring justice for survivors. Ukrainian authorities are committed to act upon those recommendations. For one, we are ready to enhance cooperation in that area with the appropriate international organizations and mechanisms, first of all with the United Nations. We will also make full use of our national human rights strategy and its action plan, as well as of the national plan on women and peace and security. The adoption of all of those documents was highly praised by the OHCHR.

I would also like to inform the Council that we have invited, and look forward to the visit to Ukraine next month of, a UN-Women delegation headed by Executive Director Mlambo-Ngcuka. Moreover, we reiterate our call to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to monitor the situation in Ukraine's conflict-affected areas within her mandated activities.

But what about Russia and the terrorists it controls and sponsors in my country? The recent case of the sexual harassment of a female patrol member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in the non-Government-controlled area of the Donetsk region, as reported by the Mission on 6 May, is unfortunately illustrative of the problem. I wish to briefly quote an excerpt from the relevant OSCE report.

"The [Mission] continued monitoring the disengagement areas near Stanytsia Luhanska, Zolote and Petrivske. Its access remained restricted there and elsewhere, including in an

incident in which an armed man sexually harassed a female patrol member ... A man armed with an assault rifle (AK-47) sexually harassed a female patrol member and threatened to stop the patrol from moving east ... until his demands were met.”

We are appalled by the fact that there has been no reaction whatsoever to that disgusting incident on the part of the militants’ leaders and sponsors. That reflects their general approach to abuses. No reaction to the shooting down of OSCE unmanned vehicles; no reaction to restrictions on the OSCE’s freedom of movement; and now — sexual harassment of OSCE personnel. The prevailing environment of impunity abets the violators, allowing them to feel free to do whatever they want.

We join the States participating in the OSCE and its Special Monitoring Mission in resolutely condemning that incident, and we demand a swift and unequivocal response. If such things happen to international observers, one can only imagine the extent of lawlessness and abuse committed against ordinary residents of the territories under the control of the illegal armed groups and their Russian sponsors.

The road to eliminating sexual violence is long and thorny. Still, we believe that the world can change — and has changed — the way in which that crime is perceived and understood, the manner in which we respond to it, as well as how we treat and support survivors. The United Nations, and the Council in particular, have to spearhead this endeavour.