

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, (Conflict Related Sexual Violence)
23 February 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan

At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting during your presidency of the Security Council this month. I also welcome the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence, which informs our discussion today (S/2012/33), and the insightful briefing of Ms. Wallström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. The report and the meeting are timely and necessary. Central to today's debate is the relationship between conflict and sexual violence. In order to better understand that connection, I wish to address three main elements.

The first aspect is the importance of the focus of the international community. With the end of the Second World War in 1945, humanity was saved from another world war, but was not spared the effects of war and atrocities. Over 20 million people were killed in the 265 wars and conflicts between 1945 and 1990 and in the 186 wars and conflicts that erupted from 1990 to the present.

In the 1990s, after the Cold War, we increasingly faced a new form of war, with a decrease in the number of inter-State conflicts and an increase in the prevalence of intra-State tension and violent non-State actors. That brought new waves of atrocious horrors, including in my country, Afghanistan. The atrocities emerging from the conflicts of the 1990s, including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, raised a tenacious challenge for the international community and, subsequently, fuelled the prompt application of international laws and norms in response.

The second element is the interconnectedness of sexual violence and other atrocities. While sexual violence is embedded within the definition of war crimes and crimes against humanity, the international community should take a holistic approach to those atrocities, as they cannot be separated from one another. Furthermore, every atrocity is spawned from the all-encompassing destruction of society caused by war. We cannot truly stop atrocities such as sexual violence without ending the violence, war and conflict that breed them.

The third aspect is the breakdown of cultural values. War is pervasive. It destroys the common understanding of decency and respect for human rights. It kills morals. It breaks down social contracts. It erodes solidarity and trust. As I saw in my own country, war and conflict resulted in the corrupting prevalence of a militant culture, countering society's values, based on tolerance and respect.

What emerged was, in fact, a militant anti-culture, caused by war. Crimes against Afghan people were committed and human rights violations were extensive, especially violence against women. We saw what had never before been seen in the history of Afghan women — a sequence of killing, maiming and violence.

However, in the past 10 years, after the fall of the Taliban, the Government of Afghanistan, with the support of the international community, has worked to put an end to violence in the country. That is essential to security and to protecting the rights of women, men and children.

Afghanistan adopted a law on the elimination of violence against women, which has provided the Government with stronger judicial means through which we can combat sexual violence more effectively. That is real progress towards breaking the silence with regard to violence and sexual violence. We are confident that, in the years to come, our efforts will yield more results and that women will be safer and more respected and will receive the justice that they deserve.

The President of Afghanistan also established a commission on the elimination of sexual abuse of children and women. The commission advises relevant organizations on how to fight against the sexual abuse of women and children and encourages relevant reporting to it.

Afghanistan acknowledges that the accomplishments that we have outlined are only the first steps towards achieving gender equality and the improvement of the position of women. The Afghan Government will therefore continue its effort to eliminate sexual violence and to advance women's rights and empowerment. In that regard, the Government of Afghanistan welcomes resolutions 1325 (2000), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009), which identify combating sexual violence as a matter of peace and security.

The international community has an essential role to play in supporting the ongoing efforts in conflict affected and post-conflict countries in order to end sexual violence and violence against women, combat impunity and offer assistance to victims of sexual violence. However, we need not only the support of the international community, but its awareness not to forget the violence that affected the lives of women, men and children. We must work together to ensure that such atrocities will never happen again.