

**Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2013, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Mrs. Perceval, Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations.*

I would like to thank you, Madam President, for having organized this open debate and for your presence here, which shows your commitment to this issue. I would also welcome the statements by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Bangura. We welcome the Secretary-General's report (S/2013/149) and would like to highlight its clear, concise and strategic nature. We also welcome Ms. Keïta Diakité, and we take note of and appreciate the presence of the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the work of the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We commend Ms. Bangura for her efforts since taking up her responsibilities, including the services provided by the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. We fully support the recommendations contained in the report.

My country aligns itself with and supports the proposal to establish an appropriate monitoring mechanism within the Security Council on the problem of sexual violence in conflict.

In 2012, the United Nations stated that, whatever the geography of conflict and its structural causes, from Côte d'Ivoire to Mali and from Libya to those affected by the earthquake in Haiti — in every instance — over 70 per cent of those displaced were women and children. We know that women in camps, women refugees and displaced women are particularly at risk of becoming victims of violence, exploitation and poverty. However, just as clearly, we do not accept that that should be their fate.

We note that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has introduced a robust policy on women refugees, has prepared action guidelines for the protection of women refugees and will continue to include the gender dimension in its assistance and protection work.

However, with the same firmness with which we require comprehensive protection for victims, we would like to say that it is vital that women be included in all decisions that affect their lives, as participation promotes protection.

Resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, together with other Council resolutions, signified and still represents a huge breakthrough. In that resolution, the Council recognized the fundamental role that women played in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding. It underlined the importance of effective and equal participation by women in the maintenance of peace and security and the need to include women, under equal conditions, in decision-making processes for the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

However, UN-Women recently announced that, of the 585 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2010, only 16 per cent mentioned women. Seventeen per cent refer to gender equality, and only 3 per cent make any reference at all to gender-based sexual violence.

We are aware that there is much more to do. It is terrible and painful to acknowledge that women and girls have been and remain the main victims of violence in armed conflicts, specifically of sexual and gender-based violence. It is particularly serious that such violence is often abetted by the indifference and complicity of those responsible for protecting civilians — and women and children — who may include members of a State's armed and security forces, peacekeeping operations or

non-governmental organization volunteers working in the field.

That is why we agree with the idea that all peacekeeping mandates should explicitly include the gender perspective in the protection of civilians and incorporate specific guidelines on preventing, eradicating and punishing all forms of violence against women, with a focus on human rights, as well as a full and multidimensional understanding of that scourge. We also support the idea of a special adviser for all peacekeeping missions in the area of human rights for women and gender and ensuring the resources necessary to effectively implement the Council's resolutions and incorporate follow-up mechanisms for the analysis and presentation of reports on violence against women, particularly sexual violence. The impact of conflicts on women is not only determined by the nature or level of the conflict, but also by the particular role of each women.

It is also true that the general needs of women must be recognized, as that is fundamental in meeting the specific diverse and multifaceted needs of women. We must understand the local and cultural context, which is crucial to understanding and responding to conflict-related violence.

We agree with the need for security-sector reform, which should include training in human rights, particularly the human rights of women and children, and take into account the need to prevent sexual violence.

We encourage the training of peacekeepers, both civilian and military and police, and the strengthening of the human rights component, particularly with regard to women's and children's human rights, as well as comprehensively addressing the various forms of violence against women, particularly sexual violence.

We agree with the need for a human rights focus in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as in mediation, ceasefire, peace and preventive diplomacy processes, with an intensified focus on women and girls. In that respect, we believe that women's participation in all consultation and decision-making processes should not be the exception, but rather the rule. As women, our role in conflicts is not passive, nor is it exclusively or necessarily that of victims.

Allow me to refer to work that has been carried out in my country, known as "Cracks in the Silence", by the women's organization CLADEM, which has investigated sexual violence against women during the period of State terrorism in my country. The investigation helped to reveal the sexual crimes committed during that cruel and painful period. It showed that those crimes had been broadly suppressed and made invisible; not only because seeking justice for individual crimes of sexual violence as individual cases and crimes against humanity — they are not like crimes of torture or abuse — was a difficult and complex process, but because it was also necessary to confront and overcome enormous cultural, political and institutional obstacles in determining the criminal responsibility of the perpetrators of the crimes and reparations for the victims.

In that context, the recommendations issued by the Human Rights Committee to Argentina on bringing the crimes of the recent dictatorship to trial covered gender-based crimes as well. The Committee noted that the State party should continue to make rigorous efforts to prosecute those cases in order to guarantee that serious human rights violations, including those crimes that deprived women of their right to liberty and a life free of violence, not go unpunished.

We can also cite, in that connection, the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women with regard to proactive measures to publicize trials and punishment for sexual violence perpetrated during dictatorships or conflicts.

One can say, without exaggeration, that, during times of conflict, very few women have been able to

chronicle the sexual violence of which they were victims. That was clearly seen when the International Criminal Tribunal for your country, Madam President, pointed out in the *Akayesu* case, that cultural sensitivities have a bearing on the discussion of intimate matters. That case, which related to sexuality, revealed the pain, the reticence and the inability of the women concerned to reveal details of sexual violence of which they had been victims.

We also know that feelings not only of guilt, but also of humiliation, contribute to silence. Internalized social shame takes hold of women who have been victims of sexual violence, because sexuality is considered an intimate and private domain. To speak publicly about such things indicates that everybody knows that the victims have been humiliated, violated, raped and forced to submit.

On the other hand, the generalized indifference in investigating acts of violence against women leads directly to impunity, increasing the situation of insecurity and fear among women.

In that respect, the Commission to Clarify Past Human Rights Violations and Acts of Violence That Have Caused the Guatemalan Population to Suffer indicated in its final report that the absolute impunity protecting those responsible for sexual violations increased women's insecurity and contributed to the victims' not reporting the facts.

We cannot explain why sexual violence against women and sexist and gender-based violence has occurred with growing and overwhelming frequency in armed conflicts, unless we also add to the equation the inequality between men and women, gender stereotypes and the reproduction of hierarchical and discriminatory relationships in which women find themselves materially subordinate and symbolically devalued in various times and cultures.

Women do not become victims by virtue of who they are, or as the result of nature or fate. Women are particularly susceptible to becoming victims of violence in conflict most especially because we are already victims of discrimination during peaceful times.

In conclusion, allow me to refer briefly to sexual violence in conflicts and to the autonomous nature, specificity and separate nature of sexual crimes, and how they should be viewed differently from other crimes such as torture or cruelty.

It is apposite, because as we have seen in recent conflicts, specific and systematic forms of sexual violence are carried out against women, young women and girls. In that connection, I would like to share with the Council the testimony of a social activist who, for the simple act of thinking and saying that the world is unjust and unequal, was disappeared, tortured and raped during the recent civilian military dictatorship in my country.

“During torture, one discovered that we had resources to withstand very high thresholds of pain, somehow to survive and to live. However, rape is something else. It affects other elements — and they know it because, in addition to the evident, there is an immeasurable amount of inner pain that is not seen like the bruises left by the blows or the burns from the electric shocks, but it is there. It is as if one's body freezes or becomes that of another person, not only at the time but for ever, for life.”

We have made progress in jurisprudence. We have made progress in recognizing rights. We must now bring about real equality and the effective eradication of all forms of violence against women.

I think that remembering, truth, justice and reparation — I say that to you, Madam President, in particular — is the only way to put an end to impunity. Certainly, Rwanda, Argentina and all countries that have suffered extreme violence know that remembering is the basis for moving

forward in order to prevent the repetition of such events today, tomorrow, yesterday and forever.