

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber
Statement by Mr. Tété António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

I would first like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his statement, and Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura for hers and for her very important role, and Ms. Rhoda Misak for the very insightful statement she made.

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security, Ms. Bineta Diop. Due to unforeseen commitments, Ms. Diop could not come in person, and I therefore wish to convey her apologies and best wishes for the success of this debate. Ms. Diop wishes to thank the Federal Republic of Nigeria in its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of April and for her invitation to this important debate. Ms. Diop is currently in South Sudan as a member of the African Union commission of inquiry on that country. She and her colleagues are there to investigate human-rights violations and other abuses committed in the context of South Sudan's current crisis, and to make recommendations on fighting impunity and ensuring accountability, national reconciliation and healing. She has therefore asked me to make the following statement.

“I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2014/181) and leadership, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, for her commitment to preventing conflict-related sexual violence and protecting women, men and children around the world from that scourge. I also thank the Executive Director of UN-Women for her full support for the women, peace and security agenda in Africa.”

“The Chairperson of the African Union Commission has made the protection of women's right across the continent a priority, and she is committed to promoting and working to achieve gender equality. She is also making sure that the Commission has a 50/50 workforce parity, in line with the gender policy adopted by the African Union (AU) in 2009.”

“In January I assumed my mandate as Special Envoy of the African Union Commission Chairperson on Women, Peace and Security. With that appointment, I recommitted to continuing to work closely with the women of the African continent. I resolved to amplify their voices and concerns within the African Union and other decision-making bodies, and to ensure that women assume their rightful role in ensuring peace and security in Africa.”

“The number of victims of sexual violence during armed conflict in Africa is staggering, and tackling the issue of conflict-related sexual violence is one of the critical areas of concern in my new mandate, requiring urgent and effective action at the community, national, regional and international levels. Additional areas of my mandate relate to the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and women's participation in peace processes.”

“I am therefore pleased to report that in January of this year the AU Commission signed a cooperation framework, with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, on preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. That agreement complements ongoing efforts by the African Union Peace and Security Department, which is working to put in place a code of conduct and zero-tolerance policy that clearly outlines the AU's strong position against sexual violence, exploitation and abuse by AU troops.”

The code of conduct and the zero-tolerance policy will be shared with all troop-contributing countries and integrated into all related training. We are already seeing progress in that area with the African Union Mission in Somalia, which already has a policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, the agreement strengthens the collaboration and common commitment of the African Union and the United Nations to combat impunity, promote accountability, implement capacity-building and training programmes, foster

improved coordination and national leadership and ownership, facilitate the provision of multisectoral services to survivors and alleviate their stigma and trauma.

“Article 11 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa — the Maputo Protocol — calls on State parties to ‘protect asylum-seeking women, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons against all forms of violence, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation, and to ensure that such acts are considered war crimes, genocide and/or crimes against humanity and that their perpetrators are brought to justice before a competent criminal jurisdiction’.

“Implementation of the Protocol and all existing AU instruments that address the issue of conflict-related sexual violence must be accelerated. There is still a long way to go and a lot of work to be done. We must start by doing away with the tradition of inequality between women and men, which is one of the overarching reasons why violence against women is widespread and so easily carried out. Our young boys and men must be educated and engaged in the fight against the culture of sexual violence.”

“In discharging my mandate, I am committed to looking beyond the view of women as only victims and men as only victimizers. Instead, I will recognize them as active agents in the fight to prevent conflict-related sexual violence. Conflict-prevention and early warning mechanisms must fully involve both women and men and must be approached through community efforts with monitoring and financial support made available to ensure their successful implementation.”

“We must undertake progressive, aggressive prevention measures and challenge societal norms that portray girls as less valuable than boys, causing them to develop low self-esteem and self-worth, thus further contributing to the cycle. We also need to prosecute perpetrators and hold them accountable for their actions in conflict-related sexual violence.”

“In recognition of the critical need to investigate sexual-violence atrocities committed in conflict situations, one of the objectives of the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan is to document atrocities of sexual violence with a view to ensuring the accountability of those responsible and fighting impunity.”

“We must ensure that the cries of the people of South Sudan do not go unheard. We cannot say that we do not know; and once we know, we have no excuse — we have to act. The responsibility lies with all of us.”

“Moreover, we need to raise the profile of women’s networks and civil society organizations, which in many instances serve as first responders to address the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence and are the first to stand in solidarity with survivors. Sustained progress and action on those issues requires the strengthening of local initiatives and mechanisms to combat conflict-related sexual violence, including those targeted at protecting judicial independence, promoting gender-sensitive school curricula, training civilian police, sensitizing youth and combating stigma and ethnic discrimination.”

“The African Union has had a gender- parity principle in force since 2002. The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, adopted in 2004, applies to all AU member States, and we hope to see its full implementation reflected in the approach to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).”

“If it is agreed that women’s rights are human rights and that women are essential to the establishment of peaceful societies, we need, in our approach to tackling conflict-related sexual violence, to enable the full participation of women during peace processes. The African Union and the United Nations should continue to build a critical mass of women mediators and appoint more women as lead mediators.”

“As the Special Envoy, I am working very closely with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, regional bodies, national and international partners and Africans from all

walks of life to ensure that women contribute meaningfully in peace negotiations. Conflict-related sexual violence is a global scourge and the approach to combating it should, accordingly, be both local and global.”

We count on the joint effort of the United Nations and the AU. I count on the support of the Security Council in implementing the women, peace and security agenda across the continent.

“As we approach 2015, the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda commits us to the eradication of all forms of violence against women and children. The African Union’s Agenda 2063, which represents a commitment to build a prosperous and peaceful Africa, puts particular emphasis on the engagement of women and youth in the continent’s development.”

“In conclusion, I humbly appeal to all here present to continue your support of our efforts in the fight against sexual violence, and I leave you with the words of former President Nelson Mandela.”

“As long as we take the view that these are problems for women alone to solve, we cannot expect to reverse the high incidence of rape and child abuse. Domestic violence will not be eradicated. We will not defeat this scourge that affects each and every one of us, until we succeed in mobilizing the whole of our society to fight it.”