

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict
16th-17th December 2010, Security Council Chamber (GA-TSC-01)

Statement by Mr. Mayr-Hartin, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations

Let me first of all thank you, Madame, and your delegation for your outstanding work, which led to the adoption by consensus of resolution 1960 (2010) before us today. The resolution brings significant added value to the fight against sexual violence in armed conflict. We greatly appreciate the Secretary-General's unwavering commitment to this cause.

I would like to say a special word of welcome and thanks to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wallström and her team for their extremely significant contribution to the implementation of resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009). Let me also express our great appreciation to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and in particular the Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and the Military Advisor, for their efforts to strengthen protection and response in the field.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made later on by the representative of the European Union and by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Human Security Network.

The past two years have seen progress in the fight against sexual violence, in particular through the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. At the same time, the levels of sexual violence in many conflicts around the world remain alarmingly high. Women and children continue to fall victim to sexual violence used as a deliberate means of warfare on a daily basis. Some groups with specific vulnerabilities, such as persons with disabilities, have not yet received the necessary attention.

The extremely negative effect of sexual violence on peace processes, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction clearly makes that crime a security threat. Sexual violence is not a mere by-product of war; it is more often than not a deliberate tactic of warfare. The Council, alongside affected States, has a clear responsibility to use all tools at its disposal to put an end to this scourge. Listing parties that are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence; establishing monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements; and monitoring the implementation of commitments by parties to armed conflict would significantly enhance a systematic consideration by the Council, and thus the Council's capacities to act.

Let me add that my delegation will continue to support the idea of establishing a Council working group in order to be able to afford a similar level of attention and response to the issue of sexual violence as is currently and rightly granted to children in armed conflict. This is a matter of credibility for the Security Council. We hope that the information generated through the new system will help the Council when it considers its reactions to widespread violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. From our point of view, possible reactions include the imposition of targeted measures, the establishment of commissions of inquiry and referrals to the International Criminal Court.

We welcome the recent arrests and extraditions of persons responsible for sexual violence and would like to encourage all countries concerned to take the necessary steps to bring them to justice. Furthermore, sanctions regimes need to include designation criteria pertaining to acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence, and sanctions committees need to receive relevant information to this end, including through exchanges with other subsidiary bodies of the Security Council and peacekeeping operations. We encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to build on emerging practice, brief sanctions committees and share relevant information on individuals committing sexual violence. No perpetrator of sexual violence should go unpunished. Equally transitional justice mechanisms need to document sexual violence in a comprehensive way and provide assistance and redress to the victims.

We welcome the appointment of the leader of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and encourage Member States affected by armed conflict to seek the support of the Team.

We are concerned by the high numbers of governmental security forces directly involved in sexual violence. The conditionality policy of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is an important step in the right direction and should be extended to all United Nations peacekeeping missions. In light of the incorporation of former militia members into the national police and security structures, the establishment of vetting procedures is a crucial element of any integration process. United Nations peacekeeping missions must also strengthen their prevention and protection capacities. We welcome efforts under way to develop scenario-based training materials, such as curricula based on the publication entitled “Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: An Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practice”. Also, the recruitment of more community liaison officers, including women, will significantly strengthen the ability of missions to interact with the local population and ensure that the voices of local women are better heard. We would like to encourage the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to continue its efforts in this regard. The Council should exert its influence to ensure that peace agreements refer to sexual violence, and we commend the efforts of the Secretary-General to address the underrepresentation of women in peace processes and negotiations and to enhance women’s participation in all peacebuilding efforts.

Madame President, please rest assured that my delegation will remain closely engaged in issues of protection of civilians, among them in particular the protection from and prevention of sexual violence, after our membership in this body ends. We are looking forward to continuing our work with interested delegations and the United Nations system.