

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Vrailas, Permanent Mission of European Union to the United Nations.

On behalf of the European Union and its member States, the acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland and Serbia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

I thank the delegation of Rwanda for organizing and hosting this important debate today, as well as the Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zainab Hawa Bangura, and the representative of the NGO Working Group for their statements.

The latest report of the Secretary-General to the Council (S/2013/149) reaffirms the pervasiveness of sexual violence and its interconnection with various aspects of the maintenance of peace and security. We note, in that regard, the attention drawn to the nexus between sexual violence and the illicit extraction of natural resources, the forcible displacement of civilian populations and the inadequacy of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform efforts.

The recently adopted United Nations Arms Trade Treaty states that the risk of conventional arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence needs to be taken into account by its State parties. That reaffirms that sexual violence needs, from the start, to be considered as part of all actions to ensure international peace and security in order for them to be effective.

Sexual violence has, in addition to its devastating impact on survivors, a broad and long-lasting effect on communities and on States as a whole for generations, not least through the plight of the children born as a result of rape. Sexual violence continues to be perpetrated as a tactic of war, including against men and boys and in the context of detention and interrogation, on which further information is needed.

Sexual violence in conflict remains prevalent, yet universally under-reported. That is, inter alia, the result of threats faced by those who come forward to report such crimes. We underline the need to take all measures necessary to protect survivors, witnesses, humanitarian workers, medical personnel, human rights defenders and journalists who contribute to aiding survivors and collect information on sexual violence. The European Union's guidelines on human rights defenders devote particular attention to vulnerable human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders and those working on conflict issues.

We welcome the call of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, in its most recent conclusions from its March session, to ensure that, in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, the prevention of and response to all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence, are effectively addressed, including through the investigation, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators, so as to end impunity, lift barriers to women's access to justice, establish complaint and reporting mechanisms and provide support to victims and survivors and affordable and accessible health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health as well as reintegration measures. We support the availability of reparations as a form of transitional gender justice. We underline the need for national ownership, leadership and responsibility in addressing sexual violence.

The prosecution of crimes of sexual violence is an important deterrent to future crimes. Ensuring accountability and punishing the perpetrators of the most serious crimes against women and girls under national and international law, as well as holding alleged perpetrators of those crimes accountable under national or international justice, remain essential. We note the significant advancement in international law made by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which includes sexual violence in the definition of crimes within its mandate, in particular as a crime against humanity. The ICC continues to be an important mechanism in combating sexual violence in conflict.

We support the continued application of targeted and graduated measures by the relevant Security Council Sanctions Committees aimed at perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict, as well as other measures at the Council's disposal, including referrals to the ICC, mandating commissions of inquiry and further steps towards ensuring systematic monitoring of commitments by parties to conflict under its resolution 1960 (2010).

We welcome the report (S/2012/732) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Council's resolutions on women and peace and security and the recommendations contained therein. We note positively the further establishment of the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence. We also welcome the continued and systematic deployment of women's protection advisers. The European Union supports the swift deployment of human rights observers in Mali by the African Union and the United Nations and provides financial support for the deployment of independent human rights observers. The European Union training mission in Mali will include training on gender and human rights.

We strongly condemn the systematic and widespread use of sexual violence, referred to in the report, which is used to punish, intimidate and subjugate women and girls in Mali, as well as the use of rape as a tactic of war in rebel-controlled zones. The report also refers to two distinct trends regarding sexual violence identified by the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic in its reports: the occurrence of sexual violence during house searches and at checkpoints and the perpetration of rape and torture in the context of detention. We also note the two major patterns of sexual violence detected by the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of Congo — systematic targeting by armed groups of civilians so as to control areas rich in natural resources, and retaliation against communities, often on the basis of the real or perceived ethnicity of the survivors, for supposed political and economic gain.

The European Union continues to implement its dedicated policy on women, peace and security adopted in 2008. The European Union support to various initiatives related to women, peace and security amounts to approximately €200 million a year. The European Union is envisaging increased funding for prevention and response efforts, such as programming to combat gender-based violence, including sexual violence, from the first phase of conflict and in humanitarian emergencies.

The European Union now has gender advisors and/or human rights focal points in each of its crisis management missions and operations throughout the world. We continue our work on specific training modules on human rights and gender in crisis management, while ensuring a focus on sexual violence in armed conflicts. We continue to work closely with UN-Women and support initiatives to ensure greater participation by women in peacebuilding and post- conflict planning.

The European Union and its member States highly appreciate the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, including its coordination with other international entities such as Justice Rapid Response and the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, as well as the recent commitments of the Group of Eight to do more to address impunity for sexual violence in

conflict, including the endorsement of the development of an international protocol on the investigation and documentation of sexual violence in conflict. We continue to support its efforts, as well as those of the United Nations system, Member States and all actors involved in preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence.