

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

Statement by Ambassador Gert Rosenthal, Permanent Mission of Guatemala, to the United Nations

Mr. President, We thank the Presidency of Togo for convening this open debate on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict; as well as Mrs. Margot Wallström, SRSG on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, for the presentation of the Secretary-General's Report under symbol S/2012/33, which informs us in a more detailed manner regarding the situation on the ground on this subject.

We recognize that the mandate of combating sexual violence in situations of conflict is a very complex one. When these crimes are perpetrated in a massive and systematic way against women and girls by armed groups, they have the aim, among other aspects, to punish, humiliate and destroy the fabric of society. Moreover, very often this widespread violence includes discriminatory attitudes, sheltered by a culture of impunity. Among many other aspects, they constitute grotesque violations of human rights, with grave consequences for individuals, families and societies.

The work that the Security Council had been developing during the last three years had the purpose of trying to strengthen collective measures to combat sexual violence in armed conflicts. The adoption of resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010) underscored the commitment of the Council to fight against violence and the terror that women have suffered in an altogether unacceptable way, as a result of sexual violence during armed conflicts. The work that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has undertaken has been a crucial part of that effort.

We applaud some of the conceptual advances contained in the Secretary-General's Report, in proposing a more detailed characterization on the scope of conflict-related sexual violence, based on the analysis and trends of some twenty situations on the ground. This offers a greater basis for preventive measures and the possible use of early warning systems, as well as improvement in the access of services for victims – or, to use the term of the Report, survivors – of this phenomenon.

We are well aware of the diverse aftermath left by armed conflicts, which favor the practice of sexual violence. We cannot deny that several factors, such as the fear of reprisals, insecurity, social stigma and a lack of immediate responses to the victims, often impede that these types of crimes are ever reported. In addition, we have to combat the perceived futility of reporting these types of crime. This leads us to try to strengthen the administration of justice, civil as well as military, so that the perpetrators and those responsible are brought to justice. It is imperative to engage commanders of the armed forces and the whole chains of command, to prohibit sexual violence within the armed forces and armed groups, and to adopt codes of conduct to prohibit sexual violence.

We agree to a large extent with the specific recommendation of the Secretary General. We must bring greater pressure to bear against those responsible for acts of sexual violence in armed conflict. In this regard, we support the list of parties, and even individuals, that are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict on the Security Council agenda.

We also feel that the Council should systematically reflect the sexual violence in armed conflicts in authorizations and renewals of the mandates of peacekeeping and special political missions of the United Nations.

More over, we should guarantee the participation of women in the solution and prevention of conflicts. The rehabilitation and reconstruction aspects are very important tools for the full implementation of Resolution 1325 (2000). Guatemala supports the notion that women should have a predominant role in mediation of controversies. We encourage the Secretary General to appoint more qualified women as Special Representatives and Special Envoys.

We express our deep concern at the delay in the deployment of Women Protection Advisors, requested to the Secretary General in Resolution 1888 (2009). We hope that in the future the appointment of the WPA will be made without further delay to fulfill the mandate of said resolution.

We recognize that we have also made some progress over the years. As examples, one can cite the creation of a platform in the Democratic Republic of Congo for the operational coordination of resources dedicated to providing specific services to combat sexual violence in conflicts; or the request for assistance to revitalize the national strategy on sexual violence based on gender in Cote d'Ivoire. Having said the above, we recognized that there is still a long way to go.

Finally, we want to reiterate our support to the United Nations campaign against sexual violence in conflicts, as well as to the Secretary General's Policy of Zero Tolerance on Sexual Exploitation and abuse by the United Nations Peacekeeping and Humanitarian personnel. We also encourage Mrs. Wallström to continue her visits to the field, and commend the five visits during the reporting period and the agreements reached with the host Governments. We trust that in this task she will engage with regional bodies to coordinate actions at the highest possible level. Thank you.