

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 24th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Archbishop Chullikatt, Permanent Observer of Holy See to the United Nations.

At the outset, Mr. President, allow me to join other delegations in congratulating you, Sir, and the United Kingdom delegation on presiding over the work of the Security Council this month. Today's discussion provides a welcome opportunity for the wider membership to collaborate on the means to end the ongoing proliferation of sexual violence.

The Holy See, while operating within the family of nations, constantly strives to promote peace, security and the rule of law as a base for enhancing development, freedom and the dignity of all peoples and each person, from conception to natural death. While firmly opposing recourse to armed conflict as a means of resolving international or national disputes, the Holy See recognizes the tragic and sad evidence that, in many parts of the world, war is still an appalling reality.

The international community as a whole and this body in particular have a grave responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and, where conflict occurs, finding the means for restoring a peace based on justice and solidarity.

Within that framework, the Holy See appreciates the Security Council's commitment to enhancing international awareness of — and the resolve to address — the victimization of women and girls, as well as men and boys, by the heinous acts of sexual violence so often found in situations of armed conflict. A just response to sexual violence must be motivated not by revenge, which would simply perpetuate a chain of hatred, but must rather seek to build the common good. That responsibility demands that perpetrators be held accountable for their actions in order to deter future violence, while at the same time repairing the damage done to victims and the community as a whole by providing the necessary reparations, support and care, in recognition of their human dignity and worth.

A truly human-centred approach to providing assistance to victims and their communities includes respect for life at all stages of development. In that regard, we regret that resolution 2106 (2013), adopted today, bypasses that noble concept and instead seeks to promote a potentially destructive notion of health care under the banner of sexual and reproductive health, which too often is used as a justification for taking life rather than upholding it. The death of innocent unborn children only visits further violence on women already in difficulty.

Through its institutions, particularly female religious institutions, the Catholic Church is firmly committed to compassionate outreach to victims, to alleviating their sufferings and accompanying them as far as possible on the way to recovery and rehabilitation, and to resuming their own lives in freedom and dignity. We hope that future discussions of the issue will remain focused on the topic under discussion in a holistic manner, rather than being diverted towards promoting political or ideological agendas that serve only to harm human dignity and are already under discussion in other United Nations forums.

Secondly, respect for the rights of victims and offenders requires that penal processes be guided by a meticulous search for truth and conducted in a timely manner. Those accused must be able to defend themselves, and judges given the independence necessary to enable them to avoid ruling for reasons other than justice itself. Public pronouncements of guilt by the media or political groups, at the national or international level, before tribunals reach their decisions, can seriously hamper our collective efforts to combat the scourge of sexual violence.

Thirdly, in recognition of the principle of complementarity, international tribunals must support the role of national systems as the primary authority in holding individuals accountable. To that end, States must be provided with the necessary technical and legislative resources for addressing sexual violence in conflict settings and for upholding humanitarian law and internationally agreed human rights standards. Such respect for national authorities helps to restore trust in national and local judicial systems and enables victims and affected communities to participate more fully. It is only when such national systems prove unable or unwilling to shoulder their responsibility to defend innocent victims and the common good that the international community has an obligation to intervene to protect victims and safeguard human dignity.

That obligation does not fall on States alone; international organizations such as the United Nations must also adhere to it. This is particularly important in the area of peacekeeping operations, so that those sent to protect people from violence do not become a source of it themselves. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the measures outlined by the Secretary-General in his report on “Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse” (A/65/742).

I would like to thank you once again, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and focusing our discussion on such an important topic.