

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber
Statement by Mrs. Furman, Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations.

In a few months, we will mark 14 years since the Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) and four years since it adopted resolution 1960 (2010). While those resolutions are the subject of frequent discussions and debates within these halls, sexual violence continues to be used as a tool of subjugation and war. It is a crime of humanity against humanity and a plague that must be eradicated. If a nation refuses to prosecute domestic sexual abuse, marital rape and honour killings in times of peace, then there is little hope for justice in times of war and conflict.

I look around the world today and see an epidemic of sexual violence. The number of victims is so large and overwhelming that we often lose sight of the fact that we are speaking about individuals: the husband who spoke out against an oppressive regime and is forced to watch as his wife is raped by Government forces; the brother who is sexually violated in a detention centre to force a confession; the daughter who is subjected to gang rape and then forced to deliver a child because abortion services are illegal in her country; the sister in a refugee camp who is forced by her family to marry her rapist so as to protect the family's honour. Our family of nations is failing millions of families throughout the world. The problem is particularly widespread in the Middle East and Africa. In Yemen, child abduction and sexual abuse are on the rise. In Mali, young girls are being kidnapped and gang-raped. In Somalia, women are being forced into marriage and sexual slavery. In Syria, Government forces and pro-Government militias have used sexual violence, including rape, in detention centres and prisons across the country.

By failing to prevent sexual violence, we are failing an entire generation. In conflict situations, parents keep their girls out of school to keep them safe. Without an education, those girls are unlikely to find work and more likely to become young mothers. And so the cycle of poverty is passed from one generation to another. Israel is proud to be among the 140 States that have signed the Declaration on Sexual Violence in Conflict initiated by Special Representative Zainab Bangura and the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, William Hague. While the number 140 may sound impressive, we must note that 48 Member States have refused to join the call to end sexual violence in conflict. There is no place for sexual violence in a civilized world. We must stand together to prevent those barbaric crimes, and we must stand united with the victims of sexual violence so they will know that they are not alone. The alarming report that we are discussing today (S/2014/181) finds that sexual violence is almost universally underreported. The reasons are well known — victims are denied legal recourse or face stigmatization and reprisals. Few countries have programmes like those in Sierra Leone, where women can safely report an attack to a family support unit. The Secretary-General's report offers clear guidance on the important steps that the international community must take. Israel strongly supports the recommendations in that report.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work of Special Representative Bangura and United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict. The work they are doing, including training peacekeepers and providing technical support at the country level, is laying the foundation for improving the situation on the ground. Israel also values the work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, which is partnering with governments to strengthen national legal systems.

The international community has a collective responsibility to the victims of sexual violence in conflict. All of us — Governments, civil society and United Nations agencies — must work together to pass stronger laws, strengthen enforcement mechanisms and introduce tougher penalties for offenders. We must act as a family of nations but, more importantly, we must be a family of compassion. Every victim of sexual violence has a name, a family and the right to live in peace and dignity. Every one of them deserves our support.