

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (Sexual Violence)

23rd February 2012, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E. Mr. Sparber, Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein

Mr. Prozor (Israel): Mr. President, let me begin by thanking you personally for your stewardship of the Security Council this month and for holding this very important debate.

Today's discussion is about our collective responsibility to give voice to the voiceless. An increasing number of conflicts around the world are made even more horrific by the use of sexual violence. These are often the most disturbing and the most hidden elements of conflict. Yet, the number of victims is staggering, and it continues to grow every day. Each one of these people has a name and has a family.

The victims are women like Honorata, a young mother from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, who was held for nearly a year by armed militias and raped daily in captivity. After Honorata escaped, the stigma of her rape caused her family to reject her, leaving her alone and impoverished.

The victims are women like Layla, a teenager from Iran who was detained for two months during the country's protests in 2009. In a report last year on the PBS television channel, Layla described her treatment by the Iranian authorities. She said, "When they were raping and torturing me, and putting out cigarettes on my body, nobody knew... Death was a desire for me. I wanted to die".

Testimonies like Layla's remind us that the systematic use of sexual violence is often the calling card of the most brutal regimes and militias in the world. State-sponsored rape has served as a primary tool of dictators from Al-Qadhafi in Libya, Al-Assad in Syria to the ayatollahs of Iran. Armed groups in Africa — from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Somalia — are using sexual violence to spread terror, instil fear and shatter lives. These tyrants, those warlords and criminals know that they leave scars not just on individual victims, but on families and communities.

Major General Patrick Cammaert, the former Commander of United Nations peacekeeping forces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo said:

"Rape is an extremely cheap weapon, but has vast and far-reaching effects. With the single weapon of rape, soldiers and militants can disrupt and destroy the fabric of society. Rape sows fear; it spreads sexually transmitted disease. It excludes women from participation in civic life."

In the year since the Security Council adopted resolution 1960 (2010), the instances of sexual violence have only increased. We must act with common purpose in the face of these atrocities. We must have zero tolerance for the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. Israel was a proud sponsor of resolution 1960 (2010) and the previous resolutions on women and peace and security. It is time for the international community to breathe life into the words contained in these resolutions with concrete actions on the ground.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2012/33) offers clear guidance on important steps that the international community must take. For instance, operationally, those listed in the annex of these reports should face additional measures from the Security Council sanctions committees. Israel also strongly supports the recommendation to include provisions for conflict-related sexual violence in ceasefire and peace agreements.

Women have a vital role to play in preventing sexual violence, which is why we must increase their roles in peacekeeping forces, negotiation teams and other relevant bodies. Israel shares the serious concern of many others about the allegations of sexual violence by peacekeepers in Haiti over the past year. Such allegations highlight the important role that women protection advisers play in such contingents.

Today, I would like to commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Wallström, and her whole team, sitting here, for the valuable work that they continue to carry out, such as developing early warning indicators for sexual violence in conflicts. It is clear that such work advances the international community's ability to understand the threat of sexual violence and to respond more effectively.

Every fall, during our holiest of days, the Jewish people pray, "May all humankind become one single family". It is in that spirit that we must pursue this pressing issue. The imperative to prevent sexual violence extends beyond politics, religion or geography. It stands at the core of our common humanity and the guiding mission of this Council. Together, we must do our utmost to heal the victims, protect the innocent and punish those who carry out this evil. As a family of nations, we must stand shoulder to shoulder to defend each person from sexual violence, as if he or she were members of our own family.