

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
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Statement by Ms. Perceval, Permanent Mission of the Argentina to the United Nations.

I come from a country where women represent 15 per cent of the military and have achieved the rank of military officers among the hierarchy. We have become a country that now promotes the presence of women in all branches of the army, where they had been banned until 2012. We have established gender offices in each area of the military and have strengthened gender focal points with a view to preparing for deployment the men and women who will participate in peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, child care centres for parents who work in the armed forces and the security forces have been opened.

We have also re-assigned personnel of military hospitals who have declared that they have conscientious objections to the interruption of pregnancy, which is permitted under Argentine legislation, so that women are able to exercise their right to sexual and reproductive health services without any obstacle or delay. We advocate for laws on same-sex marriage and gender identity and against any form of discrimination. This year in London, we signed, along with 137 countries, a commitment to bring an end to sexual violence in armed conflict.

We work in our region and we work with our region. I come from a country where women in particular peacefully confronted State terrorism — I am speaking of the Mothers and Grandmothers of May Square — in deciding to fight for justice rather than for vengeance. They chose to free the truth rather than remain prisoners of lies. They chose to pass through the culture of memory rather than the indifference of oblivion.

I come from that country and that is why we can understand, as members of the Security Council, that in all situations of armed conflict, the number of civilian victims far exceeds the number of combatants. Today, that number is the highest ever seen in history. We know that women and men suffer all types of human rights violations during conflicts. However, only recently have we been able to reveal and to make people understand that there are specific forms, different types of violence that women suffer during conflicts and that there are different impacts at the various stages — prior to conflict, during conflict and post-conflict — on women and girls.

We know that, whether we are talking about civilians or combatants or refugees or displaced persons, the impact of conflict on women and girls is multidimensional and complex. The varying types and modalities of violence affect women disproportionately and differently, simply as a result of their being women, with devastating effects on their psychological and physical integrity and fundamental rights.

Various reports in recent years from United Nations agencies, including UN-Women and human rights organizations and women and feminist organizations have provided accounts and empirical evidence of the fact that conflicts crystallize, deepen and generate evidence of the disproportionate practices of violence, based on the pre-existing stereotypes of inequality, discrimination and violence against women in society.

Also in peacetime, we still encounter cultural patterns based on patriarchal power structures that seem to tolerate or justify violence, rape and other forms of sexual abuse against women. It is undisputed that in a scenario where political tension increases and militarization appears to be the chosen path for resolving a growing conflict, all forms of violence seem to increase, including rape and other forms of sexual violence against women.

We know that violence, which precedes conflicts and intensifies during a conflict, often remains, in the post-conflict period, as part of the legacy of the conflict. It is known that in such situations women and girls are most vulnerable to sexual violence, especially rape. Women also face enormous obstacles in obtaining justice, owing to the stigma that characterizes us as survivors of sexual violence and the conditions of structured gender inequality that exist in most of our societies and often force us to experience and coexist with the impunity of perpetrators.

On a daily basis, the Council receives reports describing human rights violations against women and crimes against the sexual integrity of women and girls in conflict situations, including the abduction of women and girls for the purposes of labour exploitation, sexual slavery and human trafficking. The Council has been warned that, in many cases, the perpetrators are members of rebel groups or groups committing terrorist acts; however, they also belong to militias that are supported by Governments, including members of governmental armed forces or security forces, or even members of peacekeeping operations. We know that, and we know that women reach refugee camps but are still not safe there. In March, according to a United Nations report, up to 16 women living in refugee camps were being raped every day when they went out to look for water, fulfilling their duties and tasks, because there was a fear that if men left the camp they would be killed.

Today we know that acts of violence against women, refugees and the displaced in the camps, including sexual violence, are not an exception but, in many cases, the rule. Furthermore, sexual violence and the rape of women and girls used as a weapon of war remains so widespread and present in all situations of conflict that it is sometimes considered to be an inherent component of conflict, running the risk of making natural what clearly constitutes, in international human rights and international humanitarian law, a war crime and a crime against humanity.

Moreover, while sexual violence may be the most extensive type of violence practiced against women in conflict, we have also learned that women also suffer specific damage and are disproportionately affected in many other ways in conflict situations. Economic aspects of

vulnerability, social exclusion and cultural marginalization are the effects of militarization and conflict. The adverse impacts on the rights of women to food, water, housing, employment, health care and education are just as great a threat to the lives of women as the physical form of violence.

In 2013, it was said that there were 50.2 million forcibly displaced persons in the world. We know that women constitute more than half of the refugee population. However severe the vulnerabilities of displaced people may be, women live in situations of even greater vulnerability still, as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says, including once they have managed to reach a place that is apparently safe. Some women are pursued because they do not follow certain customs or because they were the object of an early or forced marriage. The risk of sexual violence increases also in places where they go to be protected.

When women become refugees, they must break with their livelihoods and the cycles of life and become completely dependent on humanitarian agencies for basic survival. The anguish is immense for women who leave their homes to begin an uncertain journey, which more often than not does not include a return trip. Women and girls who have fled their homes and communities often experience prolonged suffering, and the place of refuge becomes a place of violence. Sometimes they are forced to offer sex in exchange for food or to obtain the status of refugees or to have access to documentation.

Women belonging to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities suffer even more. Age, sex, sexual orientation and other specific factors can also expose them to risks of additional discrimination and lack of protection. Women who are disabled face a greater risk of lack of protection during a displacement in the camps. Women and girls who seek refuge in the cities run the risk of experiencing discrimination and abuse. Many live in poverty or extreme poverty, which makes them even more vulnerable and exposed to the risk of becoming merchandise in the sex trade.

Women and girls who go to camps for displaced persons and refugees may discover that even there the material assistance is minimal. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said this year that only 12 per cent of the projects that are being financed today in order to comply with international humanitarian law in the camps — only 12 per cent — include the gender perspective and a human rights approach.

The physical distribution of the camps also represents a problem and a risk for women. In some cases, the very officials who are supposed to look after and care for the refugees are the ones who violate the rights of women. There has been a considerable rise in the number of undesired pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and abortions. Pregnant women sometimes have to face a risk to their health due to the lack of medical assistance, which, along with the physical and psychological pressure of the conflict, leads to a disproportionate number of non-provoked abortions, miscarriages, babies with low birth weights,

representing between 20 and 50 per cent of newborns. The rate of teenage pregnancy in the camps is roughly 50 per cent. In some cases, the supplies do not include the specific needs of women.

I note that it was only recently, and thanks to the impetus and demands of the women's movement, that we have included hygienic items in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' list of essential supplies even when most of the refugees are women. When there is no access to hygienic products, women and girls have to remain separate, without access to education, without being able to look for food, and without receiving the regular supplies they need when they menstruate.

Lastly, I believe it necessary and important to have this debate today because the current members of the Security Council have experience with the reality of refugee camps. I believe that, as my colleagues have said, in the light of the upcoming review of resolution 1325 (2000); in the light of the post-2015 sustainable development goals; in the light of the forthcoming review the sanctions system and United Nations peacekeeping operations; and in the light of our twentieth-anniversary review the of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, it is time for women, as we have said so often — because we are half the population, because we are human, because we have the right to enjoy our rights, and because we have a voice, convictions and courage — we will head into 2015 staking our claims, expressing ourselves, making our demands and defending our rights. We will exert the liberty to think, to say, to act and to be what even women in refugee camps need. We do not want to be either oppressors or oppressed. We want to be free and equal, so that we can be the authors of real peace.