

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber
Statement by Ms. Muthukumarana, Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations.

Let me join previous speakers in thanking the delegation of Nigeria for convening today's open debate. I would also like to thank the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict for her statement.

In times of conflict and post-conflict situations, attention should be paid to all forms of violence against civilians, but especially to sexual violence. Conflict often creates family dislocations, shattered livelihoods and sole breadwinners, with the resulting negative consequences. Single mothers are often the product of conflict, and, in some cases, that increases vulnerability to sexual harassment, exploitation and violence.

The Government of Sri Lanka has implemented a firm policy on sexual violence and taken firm action on reported cases of violence against women and girls during the conflict and the post-conflict periods in my country. Sri Lanka has deplored all violence against women and has a well-established policy against gender-based violence and all forms of sexual abuse. During the conflict period, from January 2007 to May 2009, seven security forces personnel were reported to have been involved in five incidents of sexual violence in Northern Province. That is out of a total of 125 persons accused in 119 incidents for the entirety of Northern Province.

In the post-conflict period, from May 2009 to May 2012, 10 security forces personnel were reported to have been involved in six incidents of sexual violence in Northern Province. That is out of a total of 307 persons accused in 256 incidents for the entire Northern Province. The involvement of security forces personnel as a percentage of the total accused stands at 5.6 per cent in the conflict period and 3.3 per cent in the post-conflict period.

It is interesting to note that the involvement of security forces personnel as a percentage of the total incidents of sexual violence is quite low, both in the conflict and post-conflict periods. In a majority of the aforementioned cases, the perpetrators have been close relatives or neighbours of the victim. Against that backdrop, the Sri Lankan authorities reject the inferences by certain organizations and reports that the presence of the military contributes to the insecurity of women and girls in the former conflict-affected areas.

Legal action has been taken by the Government in all of the above-mentioned cases in which Sri Lankan Security Forces personnel were involved. The military has taken stringent action, including discharging offenders or imposing other punishments in accordance with the military and penal codes. Furthermore, charges have also been filed in normal criminal courts. Along with the application of the law to personnel in breach of the law, the Sri Lankan military continues to provide large-scale human rights training with the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Certain organizations are involved in propagating false reports against the Sri Lankan military of sexual violence. A recent report was authored by Ms. Yasmin Sooka. That report made accusations, often with disturbing details, without providing sufficient details, such as to the time, place and the identity of victims, to enable investigations and prosecutions.

Those accusations were subsequently repeated in further publications of various organizations, thereby contributing to forming an opinion that is propagated without evidence. None of those allegations have been substantiated by verifiable data in any of the documents.

Significantly, no credible evidence has been directly brought to the attention of Government authorities by any of the parties. The Government has not been provided the evidence — which is claimed to be in the possession of the authors of these reports — in order to investigate and respond.

I would like to also point out the other extensive measures the Government has taken to cater to women and girls to ensure that their well-being and security is protected. The Government has established women and children's police desks staffed by female police officers in police stations in the Northern and the Eastern Provinces. Specially trained police officers function at such desks which provide an enabling and protective environment for children, women and girls and their parents to report incidents of abuse and exploitation.

The Government has given special consideration to uplifting the social and economic status of war widows. Bilateral assistance has already been obtained to initiate a self-employment programme for war widows in Batticaloa in collaboration with the Self Employed Women's Association, based in India. A local non-governmental organization, the Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action and Association of War-Affected Women, educates soldiers, youth and community leaders about international standards relating to war and promotes the economic and social development of women across conflict lines.

We note that this year report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2014/181) contains references to the Human Rights Council resolution on Sri Lanka (A/HRC/25/L.1/Rev.1), accountability and a comprehensive truth and reconciliation commission. We are disappointed that such issues, which have no relevance to that before us, have been dragged into this report. The contents of the Human Rights Council resolution have been rejected and disputed by the Government. We would like to respectfully point out that the Government established an internal mechanism for dealing with the causes of conflict and to make recommendations. The report of that body— the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission — offers detailed observations and recommendations based on the principles of international humanitarian law. The national action plan developed on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission is now being implemented.

My delegation hopes that international discussion of issues of this nature will facilitate broader appreciation of the inherent challenges and practical outcomes based on realities on the ground. States should be consulted on all aspects of international actions to combat sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, including the provision of assistance. In that process, respect must be maintained for the fundamental principles of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that Sri Lanka will proactively continue with its efforts to enhance and develop protection mechanisms with regard to the protection of women and children.