

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber
Statement by Mr. Wilson Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations.

I thank you, Madame President, for convening this important debate today. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2014/181), and in particular Special Representative Bangura, her staff, the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, and United Nations country teams around the world for their continual efforts to raise awareness and to tackle sexual violence in conflict.

I warmly welcome Ms. Rhoda Misaka from South Sudan and the recommendations that she has made. I look forward to hearing the statement that the African Union ambassador will make on behalf of Ms. Bineta Diop, whose appointment as Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security makes clear the importance that the African Union places on the most vulnerable victims of conflict, including the victims of sexual violence.

The Secretary-General's report is alarming. He is right — this crime is as destructive as any bomb. With data from all over the world, the report demonstrates that sexual violence is prevalent and a matter of profound importance to international peace and security. When unpunished, such crimes sow the seeds for future conflict, perpetuate violence and undermine the prospects for sustainable development. If implemented, the report's recommendations, based on resolution 2106 (2013), will improve support for survivors, reduce the space for impunity and help prevent future crimes.

Today I want to make three particular points. First, preventing and redressing sexual violence in conflict is integral to the wider work on conflict prevention and a moral duty for the Governments and citizens of a civilized world. As Special Representative Bangura put it, it is a great moral duty of our time. Many United Nations agencies, women's and civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders work diligently day by day to achieve this. But their efforts can succeed only if Governments commit their support and work together in a coordinated way to enable robust mechanisms for documenting and investigating acts of sexual violence, greater support to survivors, increased gender-based responses and security sector reform, and greater international coordination. If we are serious about eradicating sexual violence in conflict, we must resource the fight. We must also eradicate the root causes of this inhumane crime, including gender inequality, discrimination and false perceptions of masculinity.

Secondly, the United Nations leading role in this is absolutely critical. The breadth of United Nations activity is impressive and it is also having an impact. The United Kingdom supports all the United Nations work and encourages United Nations agencies to deliver as one in their efforts to support States in fulfilling their responsibilities. Tackling sexual violence must also be at the heart of strong protection-of-civilians mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations, which are primarily delivered through military and police personnel. We welcome the deployment of women protection advisers in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and look forward to their deployment in the Central African Republic and other missions.

Thirdly, as noted in the report, my Foreign Secretary and the whole British Government remain committed to this cause. In just over six weeks time, Foreign Secretary William Hague and Angelina Jolie, Special Envoy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, will co-chair the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. The goal is to end the culture of impunity for the use of sexual violence both as a tool and as a side effect of war worldwide. In line with the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, the summit will identify specific actions by the international community where we believe greater progress is necessary. That will include a number of conflict and post-conflict affected States. We hope they will use this platform to set out their plans and activity for combating sexual violence.

Collectively we must change the calculus of anyone who thinks that they can use the fog of war as cover to get away with rape and other forms of sexual abuse. We must shift the stigma for such crimes from the victim

to the perpetrator. We must ensure there is nowhere to hide for those guilty of grave violations of human rights. We must, as Special Representative Bangura said, hold perpetrators accountable. Where violations do occur, we must empower survivors to speak out, safe in the knowledge that they will be supported and protected and able to access services and legal redress.

I am pleased that since the publication of the Secretary-General's report on 13 March, Chad, Lesotho, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, have all endorsed the Declaration of Commitment, taking the number of endorsing countries to 145. That is hugely encouraging. We look forward to welcoming all endorsing countries to the London summit in June. The United Kingdom strongly encourages countries that have not yet endorsed, particularly those on the Security Council, to do so as soon as possible and to attend the summit.

Under the Charter, the Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. We know that we can improve international peace and security if we eliminate sexual violence in conflict, and we have the opportunity to do so. Through the June Summit, next year's high-level review of resolution 1325 (2000) and the building of the sustainable development goals, the Security Council and Member States can make progress towards ending this terrible crime. We should all now commit to that goal.