

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Resolution 1888
Wednesday, 30 September, 2009

Statement by H.E. Sir John Savers, Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations

I was struck by the words of the Foreign Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the General Assembly last week. He said that acts of sexual violence committed against women and girls in the east of his country constituted the most shameful and serious crimes experienced by humanity in the twenty-first century. Those words were a powerful reminder of the challenge this Council faces as it takes forward work on the agenda set last year by resolution 1820 (2008).

Sexual violence is a crime for which individuals can — and must — be held responsible, however senior they are. Perpetrators of sexual violence know that one result of their crime is to destroy local communities and make lasting peace harder to achieve. That is often their intention, as continued conflict leaves the men of violence — and it is invariably men — in a position of dominance.

You saw that challenge first-hand during your visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madam President. We are grateful for the strong leadership that you personally and that the United States has given on this agenda. The Secretary-General's presence here today signals his personal engagement. He has taken up the issue with passion, and I encourage him to persist.

And as Minister Joyandet reminded us, the Security Council mission to Africa in May made forceful representations to the Democratic Republic of the Congo leadership and we welcome the steps taken to bring to account officers of the Democratic Republic of the Congo armed forces who have been involved in sexual violence.

The United Kingdom welcomes the resolution we have unanimously adopted today. It further strengthens our collective commitment to end impunity for sexual violence. The resolution gives new coherence to United Nations efforts through the initiative, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict. It provides new leadership to combat sexual violence, through the creation of a special representative of the Secretary-General. It creates new steps to name and shame parties to armed conflict that perpetrate sexual violence. It calls on the United Nations to boost its support of national efforts to strengthen the rule of law, by deploying teams of experts in situations where sexual violence is occurring with apparent impunity. And it improves the information flow to the Council on patterns of sexual violence to allow us to develop specific, actionable responses.

In combination, these measures give us new tools to act on sexual violence. We welcome and support them, alongside the General Assembly's recent decision to form a composite United Nations gender entity. The key now will be implementation.

The Council has come a long way since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) nine years ago. It has taken time, too much time, for the United Nations to address the issue of systematic sexual violence in conflict. I would like to pay tribute to the pioneering work of Dr. Denis Mukwege and his colleagues at the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, and Dr. Jo Lusi and his colleagues at the HEAL Hospital in Goma, where the women and children who have been raped and brutally defiled are given treatment and care.

I also commend the work of the many people around the world who have campaigned to raise the issue of sexual violence onto the political agenda: Eve Ensler, Lisa Jackson and the non-governmental organization, Women for Women, led by Zainab Salbi, have all played particularly valuable roles. And resolution 1820 (2008), making systemic sexual violence a war crime, was a landmark step forward.

But the problem persists, not just in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but in conflicts across the globe. The events in Guinea this week are a cruel reminder of how rape and political repression go hand in hand.

The message from today's meeting should be that women can never be truly empowered while they remain threatened by sexual violence, and that peace cannot take root when half the community — the female half —

lives in fear and trepidation. The Security Council must take up its responsibilities and never again relegate the question of systematic sexual violence to being a secondary issue. It is not. The measures we have adopted over the last two years, including today's resolution, now have to be pursued and implemented.