

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 24th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Hague, Permanent Mission of United Kingdom to the United Nations.

I should like to thank the Secretary-General and some of my fellow Ministers for attending this debate; the fact that more than 50 countries wish to take part in this open debate once the Security Council members have spoken shows the growing global interest and determination to act on this issue.

I pay tribute to Zainab Bangura for the energy, determination and vision that she has brought to her role; to Angelina Jolie for her inspirational work on behalf of the world's refugees and for campaigning with me to end rape and sexual violence in conflict; and to Jane Adong Anywar for her courageous work and powerful testimony.

In conflicts in nearly every corner of the globe, rape is used systematically and ruthlessly in the almost certain knowledge that there will be no consequences for the perpetrators. If the international community does not address this culture of impunity, millions more women, children and men could well be subjected to the same appalling treatment, now and in the conflicts of the future. The lead we set and the action we take therefore has the potential to save lives and change the course of events around the world; nothing less than that should be our ambition.

As the international community, we curbed the development of nuclear weapons, heading off a once threatened and unstoppable wave of insecurity. We have binding Conventions against the use of torture and on the treatment of prisoners. We have outlawed the use of chemical weapons and imposed a global ban on cluster munitions. We have made progress in choking off the trade in conflict diamonds, which undermines many fragile countries. Here in the Security Council we adopted historic resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and this year we agreed a historic Arms Trade Treaty, to stem the illegal arms trade that exacerbates conflict and causes such human misery.

No country could tackle those vast problems alone, and we have shown that we can confront them together.

Today we face another burning need to unite to improve the condition of humanity; together it is time to say that rape and sexual violence used as a weapon of war is unacceptable, that we know it can be prevented and that we will act now to eradicate it, shouldering our responsibilities as national Governments, and collectively as the Security Council.

Sexual violence is used to destroy lives, tear apart communities and achieve military objectives, in just the same way that tanks and bullets are.

Like others here I have witnessed the terrible life sentence of trauma and illness inflicted on victims, and the devastating impact on their families and communities.

I am appalled that the vast majority of survivors never receive justice, support or recognition despite years and even decades of waiting, and that it is the victims, not the perpetrators, who still bear the shame and stigma.

I have also seen the devastating impact that sexual violence has on prospects for peace and reconciliation, undermining our efforts as the Security Council to advance peace negotiations and agreements.

We have seen the world over that unresolved grievances fuel further cycles of violence and conflict. Where there is no justice or dignity, the seeds of future violence are sown. A new consciousness of this issue and strong action to protect women and children must run throughout all the Security Council's peacebuilding efforts.

I pay tribute to the organizations and individuals who have worked for years so that the world knows and understands the scale of rape and sexual violence in conflict, and have helped persuade Governments to take it seriously, as many of us are now doing. I applaud the local organizations that are on the front line of efforts to support survivors and achieve accountability, and which need our active support and assistance.

Their efforts, allied with new attention from Governments and efforts by the United Nations, means that we are at last poised to be able to make unprecedented and historic progress on confronting wartime rape and sexual violence.

We have made important progress. In London in April, the States members of the Group of Eight (G-8) pledged to address sexual violence in conflict as a threat to global peace and security. I am grateful for the commitments they joined the United Kingdom in making and for the work that is flowing from that agreement.

For example, the United Kingdom is now taking the lead in developing a new international protocol on the investigation and documentation of rape and sexual violence in conflict, working with experts from all over the world. Its aim is to increase the number of successful prosecutions by setting out practical standards for the investigation and documentation of such crimes, so that the strongest possible evidence is collected and survivors are cared for sensitively.

We have also set up a team of over 70 United Kingdom experts, including doctors, forensic scientists, police and gender experts, which can be deployed to reinforce United Nations and national efforts. It has already been deployed in Bosnia, to the Syrian border, and to Libya, Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo this year. Later this year we will carry out further deployments to support Syrian survivors, and we will return to Bosnia, Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We are determined to continue and build on those efforts as the United Kingdom and to build new partnerships with countries also working in this area. But we need global action if we are to shatter the culture of impunity.

That is why we have put this issue at the heart of our presidency this month, and why I also intend to convene a global gathering on this issue during the session of the General Assembly in September.

Resolution 2106 (2013), which we have just adopted today, sends a powerful signal to the world of leadership from the Security Council. It recognizes the commitments made in the G-8 declaration, which will add to the international momentum that has begun to gather but which must now become unstoppable. It recognizes the responsibility of national Governments to uphold human rights and the rule of law in their countries, and it will expand the tools available to Ms. Bangura to work with them, notably the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, which have shown great courage in signing joint communiqués with the United Nations.

The resolution also recognizes that effective investigation and documentation of sexual violence in armed conflict is vital to bringing perpetrators to justice and ensuring recourse to justice for survivors, and I hope that the new international protocol will be able to make a difference in that area.

I hope that there will also be new commitments by countries around the world support the deployment of professionals with expertise in the way I have described.

These and other steps listed in the resolution, if fully implemented, will represent vital new advances. But it is only a beginning. We need action on all fronts, from the Security Council and the United Nations as a whole, and from Governments in conflict-affected countries. We need to begin to demolish impunity, create a new culture of deterrence, and at the same time focus on long-term care and support for survivors.

We need to home in on lack of accountability as one of the root causes of rape and sexual violence in conflict, but at the same time not forget that women's political, social and economic empowerment across all societies is essential and that our goal must be the full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

We need the Security Council to keep showing the determined leadership that we have called for, and at the same time must listen to, involve and support local organizations. Indeed, I strongly support the development of a network of regional champions to support their efforts.

Of course, all countries must do more to address violence against women in all its forms, and not just in conflict situations.

We can and must do all those things but must never lose sight of our overriding objective: to consign the use of rape as a weapon of war to the pages of history. I believe that has to begin, above all, with a focus on ending impunity and by bringing to bear the weight, authority and leadership of the Security Council.

Building on today's debate, I have new hope that this will at last be possible.