

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

Statement by Mrs. DiCarlo, Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations.

I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate and for the priority that the United Kingdom is devoting to combating sexual violence in conflict. I also appreciate the remarks and presence of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon this morning. I wish to thank Special Representative Bangura, Special Envoy Jolie and Ms. Adong Anywar for their briefings and leadership on this critical issue affecting international peace and security.

The United States welcomes this opportunity to reaffirm the indispensable role of women in bringing peace and security to countries embroiled in conflict or emerging from it. Women's active, indeed integral, involvement in peace processes and transitional justice mechanisms, including to address sexual violence, is critical to laying the foundation for lasting peace. The resolution that we have adopted today reinforces our collective efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence, hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes and provide support and justice to survivors. It also recognizes that national Governments have the primary responsibility for addressing the issue.

We see signs of progress as some national Governments are making justice systems more responsive and accessible to survivors of sexual violence. For example, Sierra Leon's new sexual offence law gives stiff minimum sentences to perpetrators. Sri Lanka's women's protection units provide female staff at police stations, and privacy for women to report crimes. In May, Somalia committed to ensuring the the protection of victims, witnesses, journalists and others who report on sexual violence — a necessity for strengthening legal cases and bringing those issues into the public sphere.

Special Representative Bangura deserves special thanks for her significant work with authorities to reduce sexual violence in Somalia, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We applaud and appreciate the critical role that civil society, especially local women's groups, plays in assisting survivors by providing them with medical care, counselling and a political voice, and by facilitating their access to justice. The United States is proud to support Congolese organizations that provide free legal aid for survivors, as well as training for provincial lawyers and mobile courts — courts that heard almost 3,000 cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo last year. The efforts of local civil society remain vital and deserve even greater support from national authorities and the international community.

We also commend international initiatives that bolster national capacity on the issue. The United Kingdom, and Foreign Secretary Hague in particular, deserves praise for leading the development by the Group of Eight of an international protocol on the investigation and documentation of rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict. Through efforts such as Justice Rapid Response, UN-Women and other entities have provided valuable technical support for promoting accountability by helping to document evidence for judicial processes. And the Security Council has adopted targeted sanctions against those who commit, command or condone sexual violence in places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We strongly encourage United Nations Sanctions Committees to expand their use of that tool to fight impunity.

We have indeed made strides in addressing sexual violence in conflict, but there is still a long way to go. More countries should criminalize conflict-related sexual violence. Provisions that prohibit amnesty for perpetrators must be put into ceasefire and mediation agreements. And it is imperative that the international community and senior United Nations officials, at Headquarters and in the

field, support the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

The Security Council must continue to treat this threat to international peace and security with the utmost gravity. Sexual violence in conflict cannot and must not be viewed narrowly as just a women's issue, since it remains a horrific weapon of war that destroys individuals, devastates communities and even destabilizes countries. Above all, let us remember that sexual violence is not cultural, it is criminal.