

OPEN DEBATE: SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

Statement by H.E. Gillian Bird, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

15 April 2015

Thank you, Madam President, for convening this debate. And I would like to thank the Secretary General for his report. It's appalling to note that the year under review was marked by an increased incidence and severity of conflict related sexual violence. In this regard, we commend the unwavering commitment of Special Representative Bangura to expose and end conflict-related sexual violence.

Sexual violence is not merely a consequence of conflict. It is used as an instrument of war and increasingly as a tactic of terror. Its use by extremist groups and non-state actors is particularly alarming, not only in its increasing frequency but its calculated and vicious intent.

Extremist groups and non-state actors terrorise communities into compliance, displacing populations and generating revenue through trafficking, slave trade and ransoms.

The rise of extremist groups such as Boko Haram and Daesh – with their widespread reach across cultures and geographies – is aided by existing vulnerabilities within communities and systemic gender-based discrimination.

The UN and the international community more broadly must continue the work to integrate the women, peace and security agenda into counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency efforts. This will require a better understanding of the possible options available to us, and potentially different ways of operating.

Addressing sexual violence in conflict must remain a priority as long as women, men and children continue to be victims of sexual violence in conflict-related settings and needs to feature in every aspect of the Council's work.

Madam President, conflicts are more severe in situations where women are excluded and marginalized and we have seen the tangible benefits of Women's Protection Advisers and women peacekeepers in the field. These must continue to be supported.

The Council should continue to give its full support to the Special Representative, particularly on engagement with national authorities, armed forces and others. The signing by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) of the declaration to combat rape in war is one concrete example of the important progress that can be made when there is sufficient political will and we commend the Special Representative for achieving this outcome.

Efforts to prevent sexual violence in conflict should also be considered in relation to all aspects of the UN's conflict prevention, stabilisation and peace-building work. This includes implementing the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual

Violence in Conflict and comprehensive implementation of the Rome Statute of the ICC into domestic legislation. More needs to be done to ensure no individual can escape prosecution and act with impunity as well as to support human rights defenders and build the capacity of local civil society, including women's organisations.

The 15th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325 provides an important opportunity to expand the scope of the women, peace and security agenda beyond participation and protection to focus on prevention, including preventing sexual violence.

Australia strongly supports the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, of which Australian Foreign Minister Bishop is an active Champion. We are working to implement the commitment made in London under the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and will continue to work with partners in our region and beyond to promote universal application of the Declaration.

Madam President, in conclusion, it important to recall that men and boys also suffer from sexual violence. So too people with disabilities. These survivors often have different needs and require specific medical, psychosocial, legal and economic support services.

Ultimately, the international community must respond before conflict erupts to reduce exposure to conflict-related hardships and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence in all its forms.