

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. ALEXANDER DE CROO**

**Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Development Cooperation, Digital Agenda, Telecom & Post**

**15 April 2015**

Madame President,

Excellencies,

Thank you for giving me the floor and many thanks to the briefers for today's debate: SRSB Bangura and Ms. Allamin of Nigeria on behalf of civil society.

I am honored to speak here today about a subject of utmost priority for my country, Belgium. I align myself with the statement by the European Union, which will be delivered later today.

A few weeks ago I was shocked by the testimony of a young Yezidi girl held captive by ISIL in the North of Syria. The girl explains how she is abused several times a day and how several other girls killed themselves in despair because of their hopeless situation. This is one more cruel illustration of how sexual violence is not only used as a weapon of war but also constitutes a tactic of terror. Therefore, as rightly suggested in the recommendations of the most recent report of the Secretary General, efforts to prevent and address sexual violence should also be closely aligned with efforts to prevent violent extremism.

Madame President,

Just last month I visited the Democratic Republic of Congo: in Goma I was approached by survivors of sexual violence. Women testified how they were raped by soldiers, by rebels, even by camp guards, when they dared to leave the camp looking for charcoal they need to cook and to survive. These women were desperate. They asked us for safety and shelter. We have to respond. That is why I am here today.

According to Dr. Mukwege, who for many years has been caring for the survivors of sexual violence at the Panzi hospital in Bukavu, in South-Kivu, a recent development is the rise of sexual violence perpetrated by civilians. One explanation for this development is that, through DDR-processes, former child soldiers have indeed been reintegrated, but due to insufficient vetting and psychological follow up, they perpetuate a culture of violence, including sexual violence, within their communities. This leads to the continuation of structural gender-based violence with a multiplicity of consequences, not only for the individual but also for the community and for the society as a whole.

In this regard, Belgium welcomes the decision by the Congolese authorities to prosecute high-ranking Congolese army officers suspected of crimes of sexual violence and to offer reparations to a number of survivors. The appointment of a personal representative of the President on sexual violence and child recruitment, Mrs. Mabunda, is an important sign of hope. So is the Action Plan against Sexual Violence for the FARDC and the creation of a monitoring committee within the FARDC.

To fight impunity, Belgium will support UN action in Mali where a comprehensive national strategy to combat sexual and gender-based violence will be drafted. Here too, the improvement of the rule of law and of justice mechanisms will be key.

We will also need more efforts for prevention and the participation of women. Women must be part of the solution. We welcome the Algiers peace process for Mali, but we believe that an opportunity may have been missed in terms of including women in the negotiations or giving them a role in the implementation of a future final agreement. Fifteen years after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325, this Council should be vigilant that women and women's organizations are fully integrated into such peace negotiations.

Madame President,

I would like to seize this occasion to thank Ms. Bangura on behalf of my country for her work, her dedication and for the comprehensive report she has put forward. I hope this Council will take the recommendations in the report into account. The issue of conflict-related sexual violence should be fully integrated into the work of the relevant Security Council Sanctions Committees as part of the designation criteria for the imposition of targeted measures.

Belgium welcomes the ongoing work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, which focuses its efforts on strengthening the capacity of national rule of law and justice actors. We encourage countries to draw upon their expertise to strengthen their capacity to address impunity for conflict-related sexual violence.

To conclude, I wish to encourage the Security Council to keep the fight against conflict-related sexual violence high on its agenda and to take action accordingly.

Sexual violence as a weapon of war, often against the most vulnerable, remains a stain on the conscience of the international community.

If we want to uphold our common humanity, it is our duty to end all forms of conflict-related sexual violence.

I thank you.