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*Provisional***Statement by the Representative of Costa Rica, Mr. Castro Córdoba:**

Costa Rica thanks the Peruvian presidency for convening this open debate on such an important issue. We also thank Ms. Amina Mohammed, Ms. Pramila Patten and Ms. Razia Sultana for their briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made by the representative of Mali on behalf of the Human Security Network.

Sexual violence is unacceptable anytime, anywhere. However, its widespread use as a tactic of terror and a weapon of war and terrorism, where it is inflicted as one of the cruellest and most terrible forms of social coercion, affecting people's dignity and autonomy in the deepest sense, is particularly worrying and reprehensible. Sexual violence perpetuates conflict and undermines security and stability, disrupting people's participation in the political, social and economic life of their societies.

The United Nations, as an Organization, and we, as an international community, carry a heavy burden on this issue, having failed to address the causes of violence and sexual abuse through preventive measures and to eliminate impunity in such cases. The primary responsibility for protecting populations lies with States. It is incumbent upon us to establish robust legal and institutional frameworks with a view to laying a firm foundation for preventing and addressing gaps in the protection of victims, especially women and girls, and to expand the scope of protection measures to the most vulnerable populations, such as ethnic and religious minorities; women in rural areas; women and girls associated with armed groups; the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population; as well as boys and men, who are equally vulnerable to sexual violence, the prevalence of which is increasing.

Sexual violence as a cause of forced displacement is equally worrying, as is the growing risk of violence in the context of mass movements where migrants, refugees and displaced persons are subjected to sexual extortion, trafficking and smuggling, harassment and rape, among other abuses. It is essential that conflict-related sexual violence be considered as grounds for granting refugee or asylum status, with victim assistance policies.

We urge States to criminalize all acts of sexual violence in the strongest possible terms, including, where appropriate, by referring them to the International Criminal Court, in order to completely eliminate impunity in such cases. These acts of violence are war crimes, and a zero-tolerance policy must be applied to those who commit, order or condone sexual violence in conflict situations.

Fully utilizing existing international legal mechanisms and ensuring accountability are dissuasive means and vital instruments for ensuring justice for victims. It is also important to encourage cooperation and information-sharing, as well as to provide legal assistance to victims and training for security forces and peacekeepers. Similarly, in the context of the United Nations, we welcome such initiatives as the appointment of an ombudsman for victims' rights and the voluntary pact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, promoted by the Secretary-General.

It is fundamental to implement Security Council resolutions outlining commitments and plans for the prevention of sexual violence in conflict and to monitor their implementation. Similarly, sexual violence in the context of armed conflict and terrorism must systematically become a criterion for being subject to sanctions, applied to all those who participate in the financing, planning, or support of armed groups with connections to acts of sexual violence. In order for that to be effective, key actors must collaborate. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General plays an important role in that regard, ensuring fluid communication and the exchange of information.

Prevention is key. The systematic inclusion of women protection advisers in the strategic planning processes of political missions and peace operations, as well as adequate gender training to help prevent and respond adequately to sexual exploitation and abuse, are essential. For all of that to be possible, programmes must be adequately funded. It is essential that all such efforts focus on the victims. Support programmes should be established for the adequate reintegration of victims into their social structures, which should contribute to the re-establishment of the social fabric of populations suffering the consequences of armed conflicts. Legal frameworks should be established at the national level in order to protect victims and combat the stigma associated with sexual abuse and violence. These should contemplate reparations and compensation, taking into account that different forms of sexual violence require different solutions and responses.

Finally, it is essential to involve women and girls in decision-making processes and leadership positions. The lack of opportunities, the lack of national policies for their protection and inclusion, as well as structural barriers in all areas that promote discrimination against women perpetuate a cycle of poverty, exclusion and violence, thereby hampering their enjoyment of their rights. It is therefore critical to guarantee equal opportunities, access to education and women and girl's economic, political and social empowerment so that they can assume a vital and transformative role in their communities during and after conflicts, and can regain their dignity and enjoyment of their rights.