

**Mrs. Pobee** (Ghana): Mr. President, at the outset, let me express my delegation's appreciation to you and to the Uruguayan presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate on the subject of women and peace and security, focusing on sexual violence in conflict as a tactic of war and terrorism.

We thank the Secretary-General for his very comprehensive report (S/2017/249) and are grateful for the briefings provided by the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, Mr. Adama Dieng and Ms. Mina Jaf.

We welcome the extensive work done within the United Nations system in international standard-setting on conflict-related sexual violence and applaud the Security Council for its ground-breaking resolutions that have helped to prioritize this issue. Much, however, remains to be accomplished in real terms in the areas of prevention, accountability, prosecution of actual cases and in addressing the needs of victims.

My delegation is pleased to note that focus is now shifting from norm-setting to the implementation of existing legal instruments to combat sexual violence in conflict. We recognize the fact that Member States have the primary responsibility for the protection of their peoples for mass atrocities, including sexual violence and, consequently, there is a need to strengthen national capacities to hold perpetrators accountable, to deliver justice to victims, and to deter future crimes through relevant legislative and institutional arrangements.

Since long-held cultural perceptions and beliefs require more than legislation, national laws must be backed by multi-stakeholder partnerships and networks at the community level with the active participation of traditional and religious leaders. The social acceptability of sexual violence in conflict must not be allowed to gain ground, normalized or reinforced. We therefore share the view that sexual violence in conflict does not arise solely out of the conditions of war, but is directly linked to the culture of violence and discrimination against women that already exists in any given society, and that this must be tackled holistically.

One of the critical gaps in addressing sexual violence in conflict and in post-conflict situations is the lack of capacity of peace enforcement officers. Training in gender sensitivity, the prevention of sexual exploitation and addressing conflict-related sexual violence should be mandatory components of national, military and police training, as well as of the predeployment training of all United Nations peacekeeping and civilian personnel.

In situations where peacekeepers themselves are involved in crimes, they should be made to face the full rigours of the law to serve as a deterrent. My delegation wishes to reiterate the importance of adopting survivor-centric approaches towards victims as a means of addressing difficulties in reintegration and social stigma related to their abuse. Adequate funding must be allocated to specific and targeted programmes, including appropriate medical and psychosocial support, education about legal rights and economic reintegration for victims. Special efforts must be made to incorporate victims into justice processes and to create space for them to be effectively heard. In that regard, national judicial processes must seek to eliminate complicated or

degrading reporting procedures and promptly and thoroughly investigate reported cases as a further means of reducing impunity.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to commend Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, the outgoing Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, for the strides that have been made. We trust that the incoming Special Representative will continue to lead in these efforts. We urge the Council to approve additional resources to be allocated to the important work they are doing.