

Mr. Pedersen (Norway):

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

The persisting impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence is intolerable. The numbing stigma must be dealt with. When people flee to safety, we should make it our priority to ensure that they are not exposed to new abuse. The problem of sexual violence must be addressed in ceasefire agreements. It must be on the table in peace negotiations, part of our analysis in humanitarian efforts and at the forefront in our peacekeeping operations.

We must deal with inconsistencies. Rape is often treated as a burden that the woman must bear by herself, while a gun wound is a matter of national security. Yet sexual violence undermines the societies that we are striving to stabilize and rebuild. It destroys the future, as well as the present, for many more than those directly affected. That fact should serve to mobilize our whole peace and security architecture. If we are serious about sustaining peace, we must ensure that prevention is not just a priority but the main priority. And when we have been unable to prevent abuse, our approach must be focused on those who have suffered the crime. We must fight the stigma, investigate and prosecute.

Our response to conflict-related sexual violence must be firm and all-encompassing. Impunity is unacceptable, and perpetrators must be held accountable. The International Criminal Court plays a central role at the international level in the fight against impunity, but the capacities of national authorities must also be strengthened. States have a primary duty to prevent, investigate and prosecute sexual violence.

We value the work of the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict and the unique capacity of Justice Rapid Response, in cooperation with UN-Women, which provide the needed expertise for investigating sexual and gender-based violence. We support the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, led by Sweden, and appreciate the work of civil society, which remains key.

Also, United Nations peacekeeping operations must have the capacity to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence and other human rights violations in communities where they operate. Female peacekeepers play an especially crucial role, and increasing the number of women serving in peace operations is therefore also vital from that perspective. We deploy many women police and are striving to increase the number of women in our military contingents, because we want the best, irrespective of gender. A diverse team delivers better. We train our military and police personnel before deployment and in-mission on sexual and gender-based violence, and support the African Union and African countries in their efforts in this area.

The Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations is a resource, as is Sweden's handbook for gender mainstreaming in operations. In cooperation with key partners, Norway recently started to develop a handbook for military staff in United Nations operations on preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict. We thank the Secretary-General for his leadership in working to ensure that the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and

abuse in United Nations peacekeeping operations, and we hope it will become a reality. The Nordic network of women mediators is evolving, and more such networks are forming. We must draw on their experience and competence.

The need for gender competence and inter-regional exchange is growing as people are on the move and facing new vulnerabilities as they seek new opportunities. It should spur us all to act more strategically and forcefully.