

It is an honour for me to preside over this debate, and it is the wish of Uruguay to express its thanks to everyone who has come here today to address a theme that requires our constant attention and which is an essential part of the agenda on women and peace and security. This is an agenda to which we adhere, and we endorse the statement to be delivered by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women and Peace and Security. Uruguay decided to convene this open debate in the conviction that sexual violence constitutes one of the worst attacks against human dignity. In the framework of international human rights law, sexual violence is also a direct attack on dignity. It is an attack on the right to freedom and honour and, of course, an attack on the right to life. We should recall that, under the definition in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, sexual violence carried out by the State itself is to be considered as torture.

On the basis of resolution 1325 (2000) and other resolutions and complementary documents, we have strengthened the normative framework so as to address that problem. Despite all those efforts, however, it is a matter of concern to read the contents of the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/249) indicating the ongoing nature of sexual violence, which is used by terrorist groups, violent extremists, non-State armed groups and also by some State actors.

Sexual violence used systematically becomes a tactic of war and an act of terrorism, manifesting itself through abhorrent practices, which include rape, sexual slavery, prostitution, forced marriage, as well as pregnancies, abortions and forced sterilization. In the context of a conflict situation, we know that the systematic, organized and even planned use of sexual violence, directed especially against the most vulnerable groups of the civilian population, constitutes barbaric tools, which have been developed by terrorist groups such as Da'esh, Boko Haram, Al-Nusra and Al-Shabaab. Sexual violence as a tactic of war and terrorism thus becomes a lethal weapon of war. It causes physical harm but, even worse, it attacks what is most valuable to human beings: their dignity. It destroys and dehumanizes women, girls, boys and men.

Victims who have suffered the effects of sudden sexual violence require, where possible, a long and costly recuperation, which has a direct impact on the social fabric, economic development, family life and on everything that depends on civil society for its development. The long-term costs of the use of sexual violence in conflicts are much deeper and more complex than they may at first appear. Once again, we in the Organization find ourselves confirming the fact that prevention and early warning is where we must focus our efforts to prevent the occurrence of such undesirable acts and all of their costly ramifications. For those reasons, given the gravity and complexity of the problem, the international community must produce swift, coordinated and comprehensive responses. Uruguay supports the suggestions contained in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence and considers them appropriate.

First, empowering women is essential. The common denominator of sexual violence is that it finds fertile ground where there are pre-existing patterns of structural discrimination based

on gender. Women must therefore have access to education and employment and must participate in decision-making processes in order to reaffirm their integrity and value as human beings.

We reiterate that there must be increased participation by women in the areas of mediation, prevention and conflict resolution, as highlighted in resolution 1325 (2000). Their capacity for rapprochement, negotiation, understanding and empathy in such situations is more than proven. Uruguay firmly believes that. The increase in the number of women in peacekeeping operations in which Uruguay participates has enriched the quality of the contingents. In missions such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we can attest to the effective role of women in creating confidence in local communities, for reasons already mentioned, and, furthermore, in individuals who have been victims of sexual violence.

Secondly, as mentioned at the beginning, attention must be paid to the recovery and reintegration of victims. Victims require a minimum support that involves medical and psychosocial care, including sexual and reproductive health care. Although at the beginning I mentioned that the main victims of sexual violence are women, girls, boys and adolescents, men too are victims. Civil society as a whole is a group vulnerable to the aberrant practice. Rape, enforced sterilization, the transmission of AIDS, genital violence and castration are all forms of sexual violence that are used as weapons of war and terrorism. The humiliation and social rejection suffered by victims is a responsibility that Governments, civil society organizations and community and religious leaders must bear in mind and attend to with all the appropriate means in order to be able to effectively mend the social fabric.

Similarly, girls and boys born of war and produced by sexual violence — by women being raped — are invisible victims, who from the time they are born are denied another fundamental human right: the right to a name. As mentioned today, in many cases girls and boys born of rape are considered to be children of the enemy and face a life of rejection and exclusion. They continue to be denied fundamental rights and to be deprived of access to basic services such as medical care and education.

Nonetheless, those girls and boys are also members of society, and steps must be taken for their education, integration, inclusion and social acceptance so as to prevent a vicious circle that perpetuates violence.

Thirdly, we believe that these crimes must be condemned because accountability is fundamental to ensuring that they do not go unpunished. They must not remain unpunished. We cannot forget that memory, truth, justice and the adoption of new legal, cultural and social changes, among others, are the links in the only chain that can guarantee that events that lead to conflict do not recur and that at the same time can restore dignity to the victims. We States must increase our efforts to ensure that those who are guilty of such crimes are brought to justice, at both the domestic and international levels.

In that regard, the International Criminal Court plays an essential role in judging those crimes that have been recognized by the Rome Statute as war crimes, crimes against

humanity or even crimes of genocide. In addition, let us recall that the use of sexual violence in conflicts is also considered to be a risk factor indicator in the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, a document issued in 2014 by the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. It is therefore up to the Security Council to ensure that crimes of sexual violence are referred to the International Criminal Court and that such cases continue to be monitored. The Security Council must also ensure that the theme of sexual violence is addressed in all of the relevant sanctions committees and that the names of the alleged perpetrators of sexual violence are systematically included on their sanctions lists.

In the context of peacekeeping operations, we believe that addressing sexual violence in conflict is an essential part of protecting civilians and a fundamental aspect of the mandate of such operations. As such, all available means must be employed in furtherance of and in defence of such mandates.

Uruguay wishes to express its support for the work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, in particular its efforts to end impunity for such crimes. We deeply appreciate the positive impact of the roster of legal experts from UN-Women and Justice Rapid Response, who have worked with United Nations bodies and States to promote accountability in cases of sexual and gender-based violence.

It can be concluded that a fragmented approach is not an appropriate response to sexual violence used as a tactic of war and terrorism in conflict. The isolated efforts of one country or groups of countries, civil society or the organs and agencies of this Organization are not enough to eradicate it. Only concerted action will allow us to respond effectively to that terrible scourge.