

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security

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BELGIUM

Mr. Charles Michel (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by joining with those who have welcomed the initiative to hold this debate in the Security Council. I think it is both fundamental and urgent to speak out to express our indignation, to speak out to express our disgust at these tragedies within tragedies. The stories that we are hearing show that we are going beyond the borders of humanity. It is behaviour that is more bestial in nature than anything else. Like others here, I have had the opportunity to meet with victims — women, small girls — who have been affected by those atrocities.

It is a question of peace and security, Madam President, as you yourself rightly said at the outset. It is our conviction that this issue also involves our concept both of the human being and of humanity; our joint responsibility through a debate of this kind is to conduct our fight at the highest political level to deal with the unacceptable phenomenon of sexual violence in armed conflict.

I should like to divide my comments into three points: prevention; assistance to victims; and the fight against impunity.

Others have already referred to prevention. Obviously, war and a lack of security create horror and dread. Above all, we are fighting war against war. That is key in preventing this kind of violence and in mobilizing our will. We need to engage in enormous prevention work and awareness-raising work in areas at risk, the conflict areas. That is indispensable. Also, it can be seen in the field that there is a danger of such violence becoming viewed as commonplace, and then being exported beyond the areas that are directly affected by conflicts, into post-conflict situations. We have to be alert to that.

The second element is assistance to victims. Behind the statistics printed on glossy paper, there are tens of thousands of women, tens of thousands of young girls, whose lives have been affected in their very flesh and in their minds for the rest of their lives. There are families who have been dismantled, torn apart, torn to pieces by those horrific events. We have the responsibility to act to meet the medical needs, the social and psychological needs and the need for legal assistance, and to provide assistance to families and others to those near them. We must commit ourselves to reintegrating them into society, into economic life. Reports from the field lead me to believe that the extreme urgency of radically improving the coordination of

international aid is a determining factor. We have to get closer to the victims in the field. We cannot simply content ourselves with a humanitarian presence in a few major centres. I believe that this is a very specific and important issue.

The last point, and probably the most important, is the fight against impunity. To punish the perpetrators is the task of the justice system. This fight requires the rejection of inevitability, the condemnation of letting these crimes become commonplace and the rehabilitation of the victims. That is the best way to engage in prevention. Every combatant, every fighter, every potential perpetrator needs to know that one day he will be called to account and will pay the price for his infamous crimes.

To be sure, the task is immense and complex. There are several aspects to our response. We must strengthen national judicial capacity. We must therefore have the commitment of national Governments to assume their responsibilities. Punishments must be decided upon, and they must be carried out. Recently, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, prisoners were able to escape shortly after their sentencing. That is not acceptable. We must have strengthened cooperation in that area. We also need to support an international response in the judicial sphere. Belgium is gratified at having been able, together with others, to set up the International Criminal Court, whose statute is unequivocal about the nature of these crimes.

In conclusion, I would like to argue on two particular elements. First of all, we have to mobilize our efforts to make the International Criminal Court more accessible to victims. I would like to draw attention to the strengthened role that could and should be played by the Trust Fund for Victims. It must be effective and must meet the needs of victims where other initiatives are lacking. In that context, I would like to encourage the Executive Director and the Board of Directors of the Fund not to hesitate to appeal for specific contributions where the situation so justifies.

The second element — and this perhaps complements the Secretary-General's initiative to designate a messenger for peace, of which he spoke earlier — relates to documenting the magnitude of this phenomenon, its roots, its evolution and the preparations for the work that must be done by the courts, whether national or international. Here, I would like to suggest that the Secretary-General might appoint a woman special investigator on sexual violence in armed conflict to carry out the systematic collection of information and to gather all the material that is already available in the field, whether from peacekeeping operations, the United Nations agencies or others operating in the field. All of this should lead us towards zero impunity, and we must clearly affirm the United Nations commitment to peace and security. That must be translated into efforts to tirelessly and determinedly hunt down the perpetrators of these crimes so that those

monsters will never again be able to sleep in peace.