

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, (Conflict Related Sexual Violence)  
23 February 2012, Security Council Chamber

*Statement by H.E Mr. Ntwaagae, Permanent Representative of Botswana*

I would like to extend the gratitude of my delegation to you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting on women, peace and security. We also thank the Secretary-General for his very incisive report (S/2012/33) submitted in accordance with resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009).

Today's deliberations reaffirm the great importance that we individually and collectively attach to the need to address sexual violence in the context of armed conflict, as well as its impact on women and children. Our deliberations also provide an opportunity for us to take stock of what has been achieved and to identify gaps and challenges that still remain in addressing this scourge.

As stated in the report of the Secretary-General, we note with satisfaction that reasonable progress has been made to date in the implementation of resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009), as demonstrated by the notable efforts made by the United Nations system, Member States, civil society and other actors, including the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict and the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence.

However, we remain deeply concerned about the persistence and rising levels of sexual violence that still persist in some countries. Women and girls continue to be targeted, while rape and violence, including sexual violence, continue to be used as weapons of war. According to the Secretary-General's report on conflict-related sexual violence, the past year has seen several new and ongoing armed conflicts where sexual violence was widespread and, in some instances, may have been systematically aimed at civilians. Mass rapes of women and girls were also witnessed. That is despite repeated condemnation of those inhuman acts by the Council's resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), and 1960 (2010), which became beacons of hope for millions of women and girl victims worldwide.

While recognizing that national justice systems may be significantly weakened in conflict and post conflict situations, we realize that inaction could send a wrong message, namely, that sexual violence is tolerated. We therefore call upon all concerned to refrain from such human rights abuses, and instead to promote respect for international humanitarian law and non-violent forms of conflict resolution, and to cultivate a culture of peace.

The importance of demonstrating our commitment and political will to prevent sexual violence, combat impunity and enforce accountability by prosecuting those responsible for perpetrating such crimes against civilians cannot be overemphasized. In addition, we wish to stress the importance for States, with the support of the international community, of strengthening efforts to implement the policy of zero tolerance for sexual violence, and to increase access to health care, psychological support, legal assistance and socio-economic reintegration services for victims of sexual violence, in particular in rural areas, taking into account the specific needs of women and children, including those with disabilities.

Botswana sincerely commends the efforts of the Secretary-General to address the under representation of women in formal peace processes. To that end, my delegation welcomes the inclusion of women in peacekeeping missions in civil, military and police functions. We also recognize that their presence may encourage women from local communities to report acts of sexual violence and other human rights abuses. In addition, efforts by national and international actors to engage women and to address gender issues in the context of combating conflict-related sexual violence must be accelerated. More concrete action should be taken to ensure that that is done. We

believe that effective steps to prevent and respond to acts of sexual violence can significantly contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Botswana attaches great importance to the protection and promotion of the rights and advancement of the status of women. The Government has made considerable achievements in protecting women from all forms of violence and in ensuring a safe and secure environment where their rights are protected. In addition, it has undertaken several initiatives to address violence against women and children. Ending violations of women's human rights is therefore a moral imperative, and one which we must collectively combat. In that regard, Botswana strongly condemns all forms of violence against women and children and supports all efforts aimed at preventing and eliminating violence, including sexual violence against women and children.

In conclusion, we remain optimistic that, given our collective will as Member States, especially in the Security Council, we can bring an end to those despicable crimes.