

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber
Statement by Ms. Mejía Vélez, Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations.

Colombia has just lived through five decades of armed conflict that particularly affected the most vulnerable groups among our people, children and women, who are nearly always in the most isolated and rural areas. We face many huge challenges. Obviously, a country that has experienced such prolonged conflict has also suffered from the aberrant conduct of illegal armed groups, which particularly affect our women and girls.

Therefore, as a representative of my Government, but first and foremost as a woman and Colombian citizen, I should like to emphasize the fact that we are guided by our firm conviction that we should not tolerate the existence of one single victim. Colombia aspires to an end of conflict and the achievement of lasting peace.

That is why, in reading the report (S/2014/181) we are discussing in this open debate, convened by the Nigerian presidency, I should have liked to have seen recognition of the progress made by Colombia in its public policy, domestic legislation and the implementation of both. We should also like to have seen the report reflect the crucial political juncture that, as we move towards peace after 50 years of conflict, initiated by President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, and which we hope will lead to a peace agreement with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. This is a position of principle with respect not only to sexual violence against women in conflict, but also to all victims in general.

First, Colombia adopted a victims and land restitution law in 2011, which included such huge advances as in a programme to heal and fully reintegrate victims and survivors of sexual violence in particular, highlighting the problem and earmarking the necessary resources for compensation, 57 per cent of which go to women.

Secondly, in 2013, the year covered by the report, the Colombian Government through its National Council on Economic and Social Policy, which guides all Government policies nationally and locally where conflict generally breaks out, promulgated an inter-institutional strategy to combat impunity and provide comprehensive care to victims of gender-based violence in the framework of armed conflict, in particular victims of sexual violence. The strategy seeks to identify the barriers that often hinder access to justice and care for women victims of sexual violence.

Thirdly, in an historic achievement, the Defence Ministry issued a protocol for the armed forces on the prevention of and response to sexual violence, in particular in conflict, which was drafted with civil society and the United Nations office in Colombia. Capacity-building was implemented for 350,000 soldiers and police officers in order to ensure its due implementation.

Fourthly, our Ministry for Foreign Affairs, led by Ms. María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar, began in 2011 to promote initiatives to prevent the participation of boys and girls in armed conflict — which, as Ms. Bangura knows, often occurs — through a comprehensive programme that provides opportunities and safe havens for boys, girls and adolescents in districts where there is likely to be a high level of recruitment of minors. We call these safe havens “leisure houses” where children can come into contact with art, sports and new technologies during after-school hours, which are often prolonged in our villages and countryside. These havens are very well designed, with the help of our communities. This year, they will be established in 25 municipalities.

Fifthly, I should like to emphasize the active role of two women, plenipotentiaries of the Government of Colombia in the peace process. They represent a necessary complementary perspective in the decision-making process to put an end to conflict in my country. All of this demonstrates the Colombian Government’s political resolve to deal with the phenomenon here.

I should not like to conclude without referring to the recommendations in the report, and in particular that on the 2012 the legal framework for peace and its implementation. To paraphrase Ms. Bangura, we need to

move from legislation to implementation. We need to strengthen the institutional and legal framework so that all citizens can enjoy the necessary means to be sure of access to truth, justice and reparation for all conflict-related sexual violence. This is our daily priority. As the report suggests, Ms. Bangura can certainly rely on our commitment to continuing to comply with the various Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1960 (2010), and to coordinate with the United Nations agencies, always provided that they are in full agreement in the national authorities.