

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 24th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Vilović, Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations.

I would like to thank the United Kingdom presidency of the Security Council for holding this important debate, and all the briefers for their statements.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would also like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/149) paints a grim picture. Women and girls suffer from sexual violence in armed conflict. Victims are often left alone and unprotected when pursuing legal action, or are otherwise effectively denied access to justice. Perpetrators benefit from a climate of impunity. It is essential that we address the problem comprehensively. In my own country, in the heart of Europe, rape was used as a method of intimidation and terror during the aggression to which we were exposed at the beginning of the 1990s. Today, Croatia's strong commitment to gender equality, domestically and internationally, is well established. Our work on the agenda of women and peace and security is a key priority, and we are ready to contribute.

Croatia welcomes the Group of Eight (G-8) Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, announced at the ministerial meeting held in London in April. It is an important signal from some of the world's most powerful countries that the G-8 is ready to take a prominent role in preventing and combating sexual violence in war and conflicts.

Women are often victims of armed conflict, but they can also play a central role in preventing and resolving violent conflicts, as actors in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The continued high incidence of horrific sexual violence against women and girls in conflicts demands the international community's attention as a human rights matter and as a question of ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. It is an issue that bears directly on peace and security. The Council's landmark resolution, 1325 (2000), is still not being fully implemented.

It is clear that the use of rape and sexual violence exacerbates conflicts and perpetuates them long after active hostilities are over. Such crimes inflict indelible scars on individuals, families and societies that make reconciliation and peacebuilding much more difficult.

A special effort is required to tackle the culture of impunity head-on. We can no longer tolerate impunity for the worst acts of violence against women and girls, as set forth in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. I wish to pay special tribute to all women and girl victims of the brutal violence in Syria. We must all join forces to end impunity for such crimes. The Statute of the International Criminal Court explicitly states that rape and other forms of sexual violence can be prosecuted as war crimes or crimes against humanity. Amnesties should not extend to crimes of sexual violence.

We also underline the importance that all relevant peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations properly address the impact of conflict on women and girls, and that the increased participation of women be encouraged. It is an approach that is reflected domestically through our National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which we launched in 2011. The plan is Croatia's blueprint for practical implementation of our obligations under resolution 1325 (2000).

We need much greater progress in ensuring the adequate participation of women in peace talks. The inclusion of relevant issues in peace agreements is the exception rather than the rule. Peace accords

that fail to include women in post-conflict governance often neglect their access to economic opportunities, justice and reparations. We need to have more women as lead negotiators and ensure adequate gender expertise for peace processes.

Clear guidance on how to operationalize the protection of civilians mandate, including the protection of women and girls from sexual violence, is also needed for peacekeeping missions. We have the opportunity to use United Nations expertise, including such human rights mechanisms as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. All Member States should ensure that the training of peacekeepers includes training on resolution 1325 (2000).

Sexual violence is linked to the illicit extraction of natural resources and leads to the displacement of civilian populations. Armed groups use forced marriages, rape and sexual slavery as tactics during detentions or interrogation. The plight of children born of wartime rape, about which there is little or no information available and therefore no meaningful programmatic intervention, is a matter of our deepest concern.

Croatia welcomes the emphasis on the urgency of ensuring that sexual violence considerations are explicitly and consistently reflected in peace processes, ceasefires and peace agreements, and in all security sector reform and other processes in which the United Nations is involved. In that regard, we commend the adoption of resolution 2106 (2013), which we are proud to have co-sponsored.