

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

Statement by Mr. Briens, Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations

I should like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate. I welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Wallström; the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Ladsous; and Ms. Megheirbi of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security for their statements. France associates itself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union.

I should like to reiterate our full support for the work of the Special Representative and to commend the quality of her annual report. We also welcome the work done by the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. The effective implementation of Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security is a priority for France, which worked actively for their adoption. It also worked to strengthen attention to this issue within the European Union. At the national level, at the end of 2010 France adopted an action plan for the implementation of the resolutions on women, peace and security. We welcome the progress described in the report of the Special Representative regarding the establishment of institutional mechanisms to implement resolutions adopted by the Security Council. I point particularly to the progressive implementation of monitoring, analysis and communication arrangements, which will make it possible to gather information on sexual violence. This is essential for the Council to be properly informed. However, as Ms. Wallström emphasized, the important issue is that of the gap between our initiatives — the mechanisms we establish — and the reality on the ground. Here, the account given by the Secretariat is alarming. Sexual violence remains intolerably high. In many conflicts today, sexual violence is a weapon used to crush individuals and communities. Therefore, these acts of violence are a destabilizing factor and a threat to peace and security with, as Ms. Wallström emphasized, lasting consequences. By way of example, hundreds of Somali women refugees have been raped, sometimes in front of their husbands. Conflicts, droughts and massive displacements increase the risk of sexual violence against women and girls. In Darfur, the Government of the Sudan has shut down all clinics for the victims of rape. During the past year, more than 625 cases of sexual violence were registered by the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Sexual violence does not occur only when there is an armed conflict, as the Special Representative pointed out in her report. Situations in which there is political instability, including a climate of violence before and after elections, are particularly favourable for the commission of those crimes. Thus in Syria, the Syrian armed forces and security forces have resorted to sexual torture of prisoners, including children and adolescents. Sexual violence is not inevitable. Given the magnitude of the challenges facing the United Nations, France fully supports the mandate of the Special Representative. Resolution 1960 (2010), adopted in December 2010, marked a political commitment to use all the means available to the Security Council to ensure that sexual violence is prevented. It is up to us today to do our utmost to ensure that that resolution is implemented. The Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations mentioned that what is important today here is the swift deployment of women's protection officers in United Nations missions. We also welcome the establishment of a list of parties, annexed to the report of the Special Representative, pursuant to resolution 1960 (2010). This list should make it possible to improve communication of information on troubling situations. It is indeed a decisive step forward in combating impunity for the perpetrators of sexual violence, another imperative in our combat against this scourge. The perpetrators of such violence must be brought to justice and sentenced with all due severity. The Council has a crucial role to play in that regard, both by adopting targeted measures against perpetrators of gender-based violence in the context of the relevant sanctions committees and through its ability to refer situations to the International Criminal Court. Lastly, it is essential to pursue our efforts to implement a zero-tolerance policy in peacekeeping operations. The United Nations system and Member States must bear their responsibilities in that regard. We should set an example.