

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

Statement by H.E Ms. Anderson, Permanent Representative of Ireland

We appreciate very much that this debate on conflict-related sexual violence is taking place during Togo's presidency of the Security Council. We commend the Secretary-General for his report (S/2012/33). It is compelling in its range, clarity and detail. The litany of crimes to which it bears witness is shameful.

The challenge is to ensure that our outrage translates into determined and purposeful action, yielding early and measurable results. Before commenting further on the Secretary-General's report, I would wish to note actions undertaken by my Government in the past few months.

Our Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister addressed the Security Council two weeks ago (see S/PV.6715) in his capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In his statement, he made clear that the issue of women and peace and security will receive strong emphasis throughout Ireland's chairing of the Organization. A new Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues, Ms. June Zeitlin, has been appointed. Ireland is also providing a dedicated military officer, based at our Permanent Mission to the OSCE in Vienna, to examine ways in which the OSCE can support the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions.

Ireland has also wished to demonstrate at the national level its strong continuing support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. As a concrete demonstration of that support, we have made a financial contribution to the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. Aware that the Team of Experts relies upon extra budgetary resources, we were pleased to be able to contribute \$135,000 at the end of last year.

The report before us is testament to the need for a dedicated Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, with the strong mandate which the Special Representative holds. These are crimes surrounded by taboos and silence, consistently underreported and, even when they are reported, unlikely to be followed up. If there is to be any chance of penetrating the darkness, we need a strong and unwavering searchlight. The independent voice and exclusive focus of the Special Representative helps to shine that steady light. The latest report from the Secretary-General validates both the appointment of a dedicated Special Representative and the clarity and scope of her mandate.

The report addresses a range of specific situations spanning four continents, all of them deserving our attention. In some of these situations, conflict still rages; others are post-conflict but still dealing with a poisonous legacy. Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and South Sudan are among the more recent ugly chapters. The sexual violence being unleashed in Syria, with male detainees as particular targets, deserves our unequivocal condemnation.

Given the time constraints and the breadth of coverage in earlier interventions, I will limit myself to commenting on three points, illustrated by three case studies.

The first is a case study on ending impunity. We all recognize the simple equation: impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence guarantees that the virus will spread; conversely, ending impunity and making the perpetrators pay will act as a deterrent.

The first step in ending impunity is the systematic gathering of credible evidence. The Secretary-General's report gives a sense of the progress being made in that regard. For the first time in a report of this nature, the Secretary-General has named individuals on the basis of credible reports of culpability.

In the commentary on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, one finds the names of 10 or so individuals. That specificity of data will enable us to measure outcomes. When we next come back to this issue, it will be important to focus on precisely what has happened in those cases. What steps have the national authorities taken? What have we at the United Nations been able, or willing, to do?

The possibility of measuring outcomes will apply not just in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but also in relation to the list of parties set out in annex 1 to the Secretary-General's report.

The report includes clear recommendations to the Security Council on increasing pressure on perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence. We look to the Council to show determination in its response. Too many recent headlines from the Security Council have been ones of disunity. On the issue of sexual violence in conflict, the Council has the opportunity to assert itself, to demonstrate that disunity does not define it, and to act decisively to sanction perpetrators, to refer cases to the International Criminal Court, to mandate commissions of inquiry and to condemn violations explicitly in resolutions and statements.

My second point is that women are not a footnote; and Somalia is a case study in that regard. The Secretary-General's report sets out the scale of sexual violence in Somalia: the crimes of Al-Shabaab; the groups of men in military uniform who prey on women and girls in internally displaced camps in Mogadishu; the rapes and gang-rapes in camps in Kenya; and the chronic and largely unaddressed sexual violence in Puntland.

The Conference on Somalia is meeting in London today, and we look forward to a substantive outcome. It is worthwhile, however, to mention an initiative of women ambassadors accredited to the African Union. The cross-regional group of women ambassadors — I might mention that the Ambassadors of Togo and Ireland were part of that group — were concerned that initial preparatory papers for the London Conference lacked any focus on the situation of women in Somalia, despite the gravity of their situation and the shared principles of resolution 1325 (2000).

With African Union (AU) and United Nations support, the group undertook meetings with Somali women both in Nairobi and in camps of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the Ethiopian border region. The statement from the women ambassadors, produced yesterday, is intended as an input to the London Conference. It outlines issues of concern and concludes with the urging of Somali women that the international community raise issues of gender, including with Somali leaders.

Amid the range and gravity of the problems facing Somalia, and the imperative to advance on the political and security fronts, it is easy to see how specific issues predominantly affecting women may not be prioritized, or may be seen as symptomatic of deeper problems that, if addressed, will help to alleviate the situation of women. But the phenomenon of women as a footnote has been with us far too long. When the international community comes together in a high-profile conference, one would hope to see from the outset a strong consciousness of the gender dimension of the conflict. The time has well passed when sexual violence could be viewed as in some sense collateral damage — a regrettable but inevitable byproduct of larger forces at work.

My third point pertains to the responsibilities of United Nations peacekeepers, and Chad is the case study. The Secretary-General's report sets out steps being taken to improve the training of peacekeepers with regard to conflict-related sexual violence. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UN-Women collaboration in that regard is particularly welcome. The standards for United Nations peacekeepers must be the highest. The Blue Helmet is designed to inspire confidence and trust; it is unthinkable that in any circumstance it should instil fear of rape or sexual violence.

Recognizing that progress is being made, it is still salutary to hear directly from those with first-hand experience. In Ireland's case, we had an instructive recent experience of peacekeeping in Chad. Ireland had overall command of the European Union military operation in the Republic of Chad and in the Central African Republic (EUFOR), and deployed more than 400 Irish troops. Subsequently, when EUFOR was replaced by United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), our troops continued to serve in the same numbers with the Mission until 2010.

The transition from EUFOR to MINURCAT afforded us the opportunity to witness differences in approach between the two peacekeeping models. One of the areas where there was a measurable difference was in relation to the gender focus. Mission requirements relating to resolution 1325 (2000) were more specific and detailed during the EUFOR deployment than during the subsequent MINURCAT deployment.

That was a specific experience at a specific time, and may not be fully representative of today's circumstances. Yet the Chad experience left a strong imprint on our peacekeepers and an awareness of the challenge confronting the United Nations in that regard. Seeing the practical outcomes of gender work with EUFOR also further strengthened the commitment to training Irish peacekeepers on gender issues. A number of steps have been taken. I might mention that, as of May, our defence forces will deploy a gender adviser and gender focal points in the unit deploying to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

The report before us makes for difficult reading, but it also lays down a challenge. We can no longer claim ignorance of what is happening, or the scale of what is happening; nor can we claim a lack of credible evidence as a rationale for inaction.

The Special Representative, fully backed by the Secretary-General, is pursuing her mandate in her characteristic vigorous and clear-sighted way. It is for all of us — in the Security Council, in the General Assembly and across the United Nations system — to take on our share of responsibility.