

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ms. Anderson, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations.

Conflict-related sexual violence is an issue that, in recent years, has continued to rise on the international agenda. Such attention has been driven by several factors, including the sustained leadership shown by the Council; the work of the Secretary-General and the authoritative and passionate voice of his Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict; and the efforts of Member States and those of civil society organizations, which do so much to amplify the voices of marginalized women and men.

Last week's forthright Group of Eight declaration is clear evidence of how high-profile the issue has become. I would like to commend the United Kingdom on the leadership that it has demonstrated with its Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. We look forward to that momentum being maintained with a further Security Council debate in June.

Such high-profile action and momentum — and even more of both — are desperately needed. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/149) sets out the brutal realities facing women in conflict situations today. It does not shirk from going into exhaustive and difficult detail. That includes the 1,700 rape cases registered in and around Mogadishu last year, almost one third of which involved child victims; the use of sexual violence in Syria during house searches, at checkpoints and in detention; and the scale, savagery and systematic nature of conflict-related sexual violence in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Despite its range and specificity, the Secretary-General's report is far from comprehensive. As the report points out, sexual violence is almost universally underreported. The information it presents is therefore only indicative of the scope and character of sexual violence being committed against women, children and men.

The report needs to be updated almost as soon as it is written. As an example, the latest information reaching us about the Central African Republic suggests a situation out of control, with sexual violence employed on all sides as an instrument of conflict.

Faced with such horrors, how can we translate the concern voiced around this table into meaningful action on the ground? I would like to focus on just three points, following on from the European Union statement and from the statement by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, both of which Ireland has aligned itself with.

The first issue relates to ending impunity, which is absolutely critical to ensuring both accountability and effective deterrence. That requires a multi-pronged approach: building national capacity to investigate and prosecute acts of sexual violence; further steps to ensure that international criminal justice deals with sexual violence in a more systematic and consistent manner; and further consideration of how the Security Council can act more effectively in applying targeted sanctions.

The steps already taken by the Security Council in relation to targeted sanctions are welcome and significant, but there is more to be done. As the non-profit organization Security Council Report identified in its recent cross-cutting report, political caution in the Council has precluded a more ambitious use of sanctions in the women, peace and security context. To achieve more traction and to deliver more results, the Council needs to be more consistent and comprehensive in its approach.

One of the core recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report is that all the Security

Council Sanctions Committees include a focus on crimes of sexual violence and that the Council expand its institutional capacity so as to develop ways to apply sanctions where no such committees are in place. Ireland strongly endorses that recommendation, and we hope at our next open debate, in June, to hear of progress being made towards its fulfilment.

The second issue concerns the deployment of women's protection advisers. One particular innovation that has made a real difference and has had a catalytic impact on the ground is the deployment of more women's protection advisers to missions. I reiterate the call by the Group of Friends for the necessary and specific budgetary resources to be identified to ensure that women's protection advisers are deployed where they are needed in all the relevant Security Council- mandated missions.

The third issue is the focus on participation. A defining feature of the resolution 1325 (2000) agenda is that it goes beyond protection to embrace empowerment.

There is an inextricable connection between women's treatment in peacetime and their treatment in conflict. As Special Representative Bangura put it recently: "If women are seen as second-class citizens in peacetime, their rights will not be respected when there is unrest. If they are viewed as unimportant before war breaks out, they will be treated as expendable during conflict".

Empowerment cannot and will not happen without women's participation. Promoting participation is a challenge that is shared right across the United Nations system, but the Security Council clearly has responsibilities within its remit. The detailed and independent Security Council Report to which I referred earlier gives cause for concern in that regard. While acknowledging progress on other aspects of the resolution 1325 (2000) agenda, it finds that: "There are worrying indications that the Council's focus is less sharp when it comes to the women's participation aspect". That imbalance needs to be addressed. The Security Council should factor women's participation into all its deliberations and decisions in a systematic way. Such a focus is essential if we are to move beyond symptoms and to address root causes.

Finally, let me briefly update the Council on developments in Ireland. We are currently undertaking an independent review of our resolution 1325 (2000) national action plan and, in the interests of transparency and sharing lessons learned, we intend to make public the main lessons identified as part of that process. I would also like to note that the Irish Defence Forces are breaking new ground in producing their own resolution 1325 (2000) action plan so as to ensure that the objectives for which they bear responsibility are delivered.

As we know, sexual violence in conflict is vicious and pitiless, and there is no sign of it abating. Rather, the roll call of shame continues to grow ever longer. Insofar as today's debate strengthens our resolve and brings us closer to achieving a real and life-changing impact on the ground, it will indeed be worthwhile.