

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

Statement by Mr. Kelly, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations.

I want to thank the United Kingdom for its leadership on this important issue. We were pleased to sponsor resolution 2106 (2013).

Ireland aligns itself with the statement just made by the observer of the European Union.

Significant progress has been made across the women and peace and security agenda, with a steady spotlight now being shone on rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict. But progress has been uneven and inadequate.

The Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2013/335) makes a series of further useful recommendations, but we are disappointed to see little evidence of progress regarding the very first recommendation, that is, that the Security Council should identify ways to target suspected perpetrators with sanctions and other measures in countries where no sanctions regime applies. Council members should also ask themselves whether the maximum pressure possible is being applied to the 32 parties named and shamed in the annex to the Secretary-General's March report (S/2013/149).

Despite the broad range of activities and efforts under way, the scourge of sexual violence remains pervasive in many conflict and post-conflict situations. How does impunity for those crimes persist? What explains the reluctance to take decisive action to address that impunity — to send a definitive signal that sexual violence will no longer be tolerated?

The Secretary-General and Special Representative Bangura have long emphasized that a radical challenge to impunity can only be delivered at the national level. The real imperative in that regard is the assumption by national political leaders of ownership of this agenda.

While there has been a welcome shift towards acknowledging conflict-related sexual violence as an issue of peace and security, rather than viewing it simply as a women's issue, it is undeniable that sexual violence touches women and affects women far more profoundly than men. It is therefore appropriate that women take the lead in driving the necessary national political change.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region, which might be considered the cockpit of conflict-related sexual violence, is a case in point. On 4 June, the Permanent Mission of Ireland convened a high-level panel discussion on women and peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region. A report on the event is available on our website. At the event, Special Envoy Mary Robinson explored the opportunities provided by the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. In particular, she highlighted the importance of bringing together women civil society leaders as part of a regional platform for peace. At the panel discussion, Special Representative Bangura described the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework as a new opportunity to tap into the vast potential that is African women. Lina Zedriga, a civil society leader for Uganda, offered powerful personal testimony and called for women to be given the opportunity to speak for themselves, saying "We are not victims; we are stakeholders".

In support of Mary Robinson, Lina Zedriga and women's leaders like her from the region intend to join forces to change the national political calculus. They aim to encourage and pressure national political leaders to take ownership of the issue of sexual violence and to implement the full range of commitments they have made under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. To help kick-

start the process of engaging women, Ireland is pleased to co-fund an event in Bujumbura next month organized by Femmes Africa Solidarité.

While the greatest potential for change lies at the national level, we must all assume more responsibility and do so with a keener sense of urgency. For our part, Ireland recently published an independent mid-term progress report on implementation of our national action plan, based on resolution 1325 (2000). We are one of a very small number of countries to publicly share the lessons we have identified — where we have done well and where we need to improve. We hope that other States will benefit from the report, which is available on our website. We will focus, too, on preventing and responding to gender-based violence in the immediate aftermath of humanitarian emergencies, including through a roundtable on 28 June in Brussels that Ireland, as current President of the Council of the European Union, will co-host.

As Zainab Bangura pointed out, it is still largely cost-free to rape a woman, child or man in conflict, and sexual violence is used so widely precisely because it is “such a cheap and devastating weapon”. Although there are many worthwhile initiatives being pursued to combat sexual violence, they are not enough.

At the Security Council debate last week (S/PV.6980), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict announced the launch of a campaign to galvanize concerned Governments, interested Member States and the United Nations system to end the recruitment and use of children by State forces in armed conflict by 2016. Do we dare to challenge ourselves in a similar fashion and to raise the level of our ambition?