

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict
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Statement by Lieutenant General Gaye, Military Advisor for Peacekeeping Operations

It is an honour to stand before the Council and to share my experience in addressing conflict-related sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

On 4 April 2005, I took up my functions as Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), and on 8 April I travelled to Walungu in South Kivu on an initial visit to the company deployed there. During the Commander's briefing, I was informed of raids by the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda on villages where women were kidnapped, turned into sex slaves and released only when they became pregnant. That was later confirmed to me in a letter from the Ninja group chief, which I have kept religiously. It was in this way that, within a few days of stepping onto Congolese soil, I was made aware of the gravity and magnitude of the sexual violence that was prevalent in that country.

It is with that in mind that I wish to pay tribute to Ms. Wallström and to you, Madame President, for your contributions to the fight against sexual violence and for the protection of civilians. As a former Force Commander in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I would like to emphasize that commitment to preventing sexual violence is a key part of the broader effort to protect civilians. It was therefore an integral and specific component of the Mission's implementation strategy for the protection of civilians and in support of the national authorities, with a view to ensuring the sustainability of efforts to build local ownership in addressing protection priorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

MONUC worked diligently in coordination with protection partners to develop a Mission strategy to address protection issues in a coherent and holistic conceptual framework. Furthermore, we issued a practical set of specific guidelines on sexual and gender-based violence for tactical-level military and field-level troops to improve preventive and responsive actions by offering a checklist of activities to be undertaken by military components in response to sexual violence against civilians.

From my experience in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, addressing sexual violence requires the following: first of all, clear commitment from the leadership all the way from the top down; translating that commitment into operational orders and directives for the Mission; awareness of what constitutes a security threat, taking into account the perspectives of the local community, including women's organizations, with adequate flexibility and capacity to adapt military operations, including deployment tactics, patterns and frequency of patrols, information analysis, and response and adaptation to protection needs; strengthening civilian-military relationships, including specific outreach to community women so they can give information about patterns of attack and so that peacekeepers can also build confidence; improving understanding of local, political, social and protection dynamics; enhancing the capacity to address emergency situations; and acting as a catalyst to build confidence at all levels within the local community.

Secondly, the strategy elaborated by the leadership must be implemented on the ground. As a Force Commander and a member of the senior management of the integrated peacekeeping mission, I ensured that my force directives, concept of operations, rules of engagement — approved by the UnderSecretary-General — and standard operating procedures reflected the task of protecting civilians, including women and children, from sexual violence.

Our military leaders, from my Deputy Force Commander to battalion and company commanders, understood this mandated responsibility, which they translated into practical operations aimed at protecting civilians from physical violence and facilitating the establishment of a protective environment. Some of those operations and key considerations included identifying high-risk areas and vulnerabilities; improving military liaison with local populations through community liaison interpreters; taking mitigation measures and employing crisis response; and coordinating with humanitarian partners, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. Lastly, strategies to counter sexual violence should take account of lessons learned to identify weaknesses within the system and to assess the efficiency of the mechanisms in place in order to make necessary adjustments.

In view of this, experience and lessons learned reaffirm that responding to sexual violence inflicted on women and children by armed elements in our areas of operation is an integral part of peacekeepers' responsibility to deliver better protection of civilians. In this connection, and as Mr. Le Roy stated, the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support have developed a number of guidelines, including the operational concept, the strategic framework for drafting protection of civilian strategies in peacekeeping operations, and the inventory of peacekeeping practices, intended to address conflict-related sexual violence.

In my current capacity as Military Adviser in Peacekeeping Operations, I will endeavour to ensure that military planning processes integrate protection priorities and that our force generation efforts respond to the skill set and capabilities required to carry out protection of civilians tasks. In addition, I am considering issuing specific guidelines for heads of military components on the protection of civilians, including against sexual violence, as a priority in the Office of Military Affairs. Last but not least, I will also continue to engage Member States to deploy female military personnel, as Mr. Le Roy urged.

The success and sustainability of our efforts to prevent sexual violence in conflict situations require the engagement of all partners and an integrated approach to promoting women's rights and security.