

Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 2014, Security Council Chamber
Statement by Mrs. Schwalger, Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the United Nations.

New Zealand wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General, Special Representative Bangura and Ms. Misaka for their statements. We also thank the delegation of Nigeria for convening this debate today. It is important that the Council continues to state, in the clearest possible terms, that conflict-related sexual violence will not be tolerated and that it makes all efforts to give those words effect.

We have seen some significant steps forward since the Council last convened an open debate to consider this issue in 2013 (see S/PV.7044), including the adoption of resolution 2106 (2013). Over the past year, we have also welcomed specific commitments made by a number of countries to combat sexual violence in armed conflict.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2014/181) on conflict-related sexual violence is sobering; it illustrates the scale and severity of the challenges that remain. It is clear that political commitments need to translate into concrete actions on the ground. The international community must address the use of sexual violence to intimidate and maintain social control, reprisals against those who report crimes, the targeting of children and the lack of access to justice, as well as many other difficult challenges.

In the face of those challenges, what can be done? First and foremost, national Governments themselves must show leadership. As an international community, we must support efforts by national Governments and by other actors, including civil society. The Security Council must also continue to focus on the issue.

If lasting progress is to be made, then we must focus on preventing conflict-related sexual violence from occurring in the first place by dealing with root causes. That requires national Governments, supported by the United Nations, to emphasize better education at all levels within communities — from schools to health centres to the military — in order to help shift social attitudes and improve understanding of sexual violence.

The Security Council must ensure that there is an ongoing systematic focus on prevention, including in all the relevant country-specific resolutions, in peacekeeping mandate authorizations and renewals, and in special political missions. Ensuring strong monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements will help to identify situations of risk early so that they can be addressed. That will also require coordination and information-sharing across United Nations activities.

We strongly encourage the ongoing training of United Nations peacekeepers to protect populations from sexual violence. Peacekeepers can provide a strong line of prevention and response, both in terms of recognizing early warning signs and reporting them, as well as addressing appropriately instances where sexual violence has occurred. Good quality training that is comprehensive and contextual should ensure that peacekeepers are able to recognize and respond to those most vulnerable to sexual violence. That includes, for example, persons with disabilities who have a heightened risk of sexual violence but often face challenges to both prevent and report sexual violence.

Women's protection advisers play a critical role in prevention and response, and New Zealand calls for more advisers to be deployed to the relevant missions. Consideration should also be given to ensuring adequate deployment of child protection advisers, reflecting the fact that young people are often victims.

Effective accountability is vital to hold perpetrators to account, to ensure recognition for victims and to deter future crimes. We acknowledge the important work done by international tribunals and the International Criminal Court in strengthening international law on sexual violence. The focus the Council has paid to accountability in resolution 2106 (2013) was welcome, and we must continue that trend by ensuring that accountability and access to justice are part of all our conversations about conflict-related sexual violence.

At the national level, effective accountability requires strong domestic laws, institutions and practical mechanisms that actually enable access to justice. We applaud the engagement so far of United Nations actors, in particular the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, to support national authorities to achieve accountability. New Zealand encourages the continuation and deepening of that support.

New Zealand is one of the 144 countries that endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, an initiative of the United Kingdom. The Declaration demonstrated that the political will exists to tackle conflict-related sexual violence. The upcoming Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, to be held in London in June, provides an important opportunity to grow the political will and identify practical actions while reflecting on some of the concerns raised in the Council today.

New Zealand strongly endorses the Secretary-General's and others' call for all parties to conflict responsible for acts of sexual violence to cease that horrendous conduct and to make protection commitments. We also call for the further strengthening and implementation of the protection framework while ensuring that protection is extended to those most vulnerable to conflict-related sexual violence.