

**Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Council, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2013, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Ms. Keïta Diakité, NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.*

I would like to thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council. I speak today on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. I am also here in my capacity as the President of the Peace and Security Network of Women of the Area of the Economic Community of West African States.

We at the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security appreciate the ongoing work by numerous actors to combat violence against women, including the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We also welcome the analysis and recommendations in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/149) on conflict-related sexual violence, including the recommendations that emphasize the ongoing necessity for disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and security-sector reform programmes that are explicitly gender-responsive. The report highlights the urgency of addressing sexual violence in conflict in various situations — such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The report also highlights the devastating impact of sexual violence in the conflict in my own country, Mali.

Effectively addressing the complexities of conflict-related sexual violence requires powerful and urgent leadership at all levels, the local, national, regional and international. Commitment and action in times of conflict, as well as post-conflict times and times of peace, are essential.

Today I will address several key areas where making progress is essential, namely, women's participation and equality, prevention, response, accountability, and resources.

With regard to participation and equality, sexual violence in conflict brutally reinforces the notion that women are not equal to men, and that they can be violated with total impunity. Achieving sustainable peace and the elimination of sexual violence in conflict will continue to be impossible if the root causes of inequality are not addressed. In practice, that means ensuring women's equality at every stage of the peace process and that all peace agreements include effective responses to crimes committed against women. And that means including guarantees of women's human rights in the content of peace agreements, stating that sexual violence violates ceasefire agreements, and forbidding amnesty for sexual crimes. Forceful action must be taken on this issue, particularly in order to ensure that the international community rejects peace agreements lacking women's participation and involvement, and also that political processes ensure that women's human rights are protected and that women representatives are included in the decision-making process.

The prevention of sexual violence in conflict and of the underlying causes of conflict itself is the most powerful instrument we have. As the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2013/149) demonstrates, and as I myself saw in Mali in recent months, there is a devastating link between the flow of arms and the perpetration of sexual violence. The members of the NGO Working Group have campaigned for an arms trade treaty that takes into account the problems associated with discrimination against women, not because women are vulnerable but because we are targets. It is now up to Member States to recognize how much the availability of arms affects violence against women and women's participation in social and political life. We call on States to uphold their commitments regarding women and peace and security in all disarmament processes.

In cases of sexual violence, the response to victims and survivors is crucial. Survivors and their families have the right to adequately funded medical, psychological and legal support and rehabilitation programmes. Without such services, victims' physical and mental health can be irreparably damaged. Besides that, impunity for perpetrators too often remains the norm. In Mali, the 2012 military coup d'état drove many of those providing services for victims out of the country, leaving survivors without access to emergency medical services or to any psychological help. With the support of UN-Women, my organization, the Association of Malian Jurists, and some others were able to partially fill that gap. But the political crisis highlights just how precarious the situation remains for survivors and service providers. In addition, with services mainly concentrated in Bamako, many female victims of the conflict in the north of the country were unable to get help.

Comprehensive services, from medical to psychological to legal, must be available, safe and easily accessible by the victims. Medical care for survivors must be of the highest quality possible and provided in accordance with international humanitarian law and World Health Organization guidelines, while recognizing the right of women and girls to non-discriminatory medical care, including the right to terminate a pregnancy resulting from rape.

With regard to accountability and reparations, impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence, unfortunately, remains overwhelmingly the norm. In the context of conflict, the reform of the security and justice sectors must ensure that crimes of sexual violence are effectively addressed and responded to. Every recourse to justice, including referrals to the International Criminal Court, should be pursued. Reparations, as the Secretary-General's report says, can be an important form of transitional justice for all victims of sexual violence, especially women and girls, and an important tool for redress and acknowledgement of suffering borne. Such efforts should include activities aimed at combating the stigma that accompanies crimes of sexual violence. In Mali, for example, we need collective recognition of the crimes of sexual violence that have been committed during the conflict. In the absence of such recognition, women who attempt to seek justice often have great difficulty accessing courts, and many are even accused of being prostitutes. It is imperative that survivors of sexual violence cease to be blamed and victimized when they seek assistance and justice.

Concerning support for the work of organizations headed by women, civil society plays a key role in combating sexual violence in conflict. Sufficient resources must be directed to civil-society organizations led by women, particularly those that help victims and that give women access to justice and the political decision-making process. Because of the nature of their work, defenders of women's human rights continue to be the target of attacks and threats in many parts of the world. Member States should immediately take the steps necessary to ensure that such defenders are protected and supported, and to recognize and reduce the risks they face. In that way the States Members of the United Nations, particularly those on the Security Council, can ensure that the voices of the victims of sexual violence are heard and their situation is improved.

When conflict and violence arose in Mali, we women mobilized for peace but, sadly, had neither the power nor the training needed to make our voices heard. With the assistance of international partners, including UN-Women, 80 Malian women have been trained in mediation, negotiation and mobilization — skills that are essential to ensuring that women in danger can be heard.

Today I have discussed several examples from my country, Mali, but, sadly, there are many similar examples in many other countries. In all those countries, we are aware of how we need to work together to prevent, to respond, to have accountability and to ensure that women can achieve their full potential. While we have made great strides in terms of identifying the scourge of sexual violence in conflict, we look forward with impatience to the day when the commitments made by so many of those in the Chamber bear fruit.