

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

Statement by Mr. Moura, Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations.

I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative Zainab Bangura for their remarks. I commend all Council members for the adoption by consensus of resolution 2106 (2013) today, which Portugal has co-sponsored and which will help us to further implement our common fight against sexual violence.

Portugal obviously shares the views that will be expressed by the observer of the European Union, but allow me to underline some aspects of particular significance to my country.

In recent years, Security Council resolutions have recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war and its potential to undermine peace and security. We need to recognize that much has been accomplished since 2010. Monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements have been established in a number of conflict or post-conflict situations to collect more consistent information on conflict related sexual violence. A list of parties to conflicts that are credibly suspected of committing sexual violence on a repeated basis has been set up. A dialogue with those parties has been established by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to obtain protection commitments and the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict has been formed to assist national authorities to reinforce judicial systems. Last but not least, the Council has adopted sanctions against perpetrators that have been identified or that are credibly suspected of having committed sexual violence in situations of armed conflict on its agenda.

Portugal values those significant achievements because there is no real security without women's security. The achievements will increasingly make sexual violence a liability for armed groups by exposing their leaders to international scrutiny and pressure. Another accomplishment that we value is the knowledge that has been developed on the issue in the past three years by the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The different dimensions of the problem are now better understood, and by better understanding the problem, the international community will be in a better position to fight it efficiently.

Portugal recognizes that, while the Council has been quite successful in discharging its responsibilities, much more can be done to reinforce the effectiveness of our common fight against sexual violence. We strongly support, in that regard, the five-point priority agenda carried out by Special Representative Zainab Bangura: ending impunity, empowering women, mobilizing political leadership, increasing recognition of rape as a tactic and consequence of conflict and ensuring a more coherent response from the United Nations system. Those five elements represent fundamental goals that are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

We should start to work towards the effectiveness of our fight against sexual violence by making full use of the existing tools — for instance, by ensuring the deployment in relevant peacekeeping operations of women's protection advisers, who will strengthen the prevention and the response to sexual violence. Many challenges have delayed the deployment of those advisers, even when specifically requested by the Council. That should not be acceptable. Constraints in the establishment of peacekeeping missions should not be at the expense of women's protection advisers, especially if sexual violence has been identified as a major concern in a conflict or post-conflict situation.

Another promising tool at the disposal of Member States that could be further engaged is the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. The lack of capacity at the national level to investigate and prosecute sexual violence remains the main obstacle to ensuring accountability, and

leads to the prevalence of impunity. It is, therefore, extremely encouraging that a number of countries have already requested technical cooperation from the Team to respond promptly and effectively to conflict-related sexual violence and to strengthen the capacity of their national rule of law and justice actors. Portugal commends the three United Nations entities — the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Programme — for their work in providing assistance in preventing and addressing that form of violence.

Urgent action in another dimension of the broader women, peace and security agenda will also have a positive impact on our common fight against sexual violence. Indeed, the full and effective participation of women in formal peace processes will allow peacemakers to benefit fully from their knowledge and experience. By empowering women and upholding women's rights, we will also fight sexual violence more efficiently.

Women are often — intentionally or by a lack of security structures — placed at risk. It is striking that sexual violence has been absent so often from peace talks and peace agreements, including those that have followed conflicts where sexual violence was a major feature of the fighting. The Security Council and the United Nations can, in general, play an important role in changing that situation. Sexual violence needs to be included in the definition of acts prohibited by ceasefires, and needs to be reflected in specific provisions of peace agreements related to security arrangements and transitional justice.

In past years, some notable actions have been taken to combat impunity at national and international levels. Governments have prosecuted senior officers of their armed forces for crimes of sexual violence, and leaders of parties to armed conflict have been arrested and transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Subsequent verdicts of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the ICC constitute important landmarks of international justice and demonstrate that accountability for sexual violence is possible. They send a clear signal to many parties to armed conflict throughout the world that impunity is unacceptable. But they also send a powerful signal to the victims of sexual violence that no political or military leader is above the law. That fundamental political message needs to be constantly emphasized by the United Nations, and by the Security Council, in particular.

I conclude this intervention with a word for the victims and the survivors of sexual violence. There is a need for recognition and reparation. There is a crucial need to extend affordable and accessible health services to survivors. Our aim is, certainly, to bring the perpetrators of sexual violence to justice; but also to bring justice and adequate care to the survivors and victims of such hideous crimes.