

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

Statement by Mr. Beck, Permanent Mission of Solomon Islands to the United Nations.

I would like to thank the United Kingdom for its ongoing leadership on the issue of women and peace and security. I also commend you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate of the Council on sexual violence in conflict.

The Solomon Islands agrees that sexual violence is widespread in conflicts and is often used as a tool to deliberately humiliate opponents. A number of Council resolutions speak to that, particularly resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010), as well as resolution 1325 (2000). It is also correct to say that the vast majority of victims and survivors of sexual violence do not see justice come their way.

Turning to the purposes of this debate — to examine the mechanisms and processes by which countries have dealt with the victims and survivors of sexual violence — I would like to share some of the experience of the Solomon Islands in dealing with victims of sexual violence during and after a period of conflict. The Solomon Islands went through an ethnic conflict between 1998 and 2000. In 2009, with the support of the United Nations, and particularly of Australia, currently a member of the Security Council, the Solomon Islands established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Commission provided a mechanism for the victims' stories to be heard and for efforts to be made to restore the dignity of survivors of that ethnic conflict, including those who had been sexually violated, with the Commission listening in compassion and respect and providing a space for expression in a traditional society where shame and humiliation often prevent victims from coming forward. The Commission, established by law in the Solomon Islands, has since presented its findings and recommendations to my Government.

Secondly, while primary responsibility in this area lies with States, I would like to underscore that in 2003, at the invitation of the Government of the Solomon Islands, a regional assistance mission, as provided for under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, and led by Australia and strongly supported by New Zealand and all the Pacific small island developing States, was deployed to the Solomon Islands. The mission, which included military, police and civilian components, undertook peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peacemaking initiatives. One of its roles was to strengthen the country's security apparatus and address gaps in the system, including regional support for strengthening the rule of law, such as institutional training of police and corrections officers and building court infrastructure and police stations all over the country. That support has enabled the Solomon Islands to conduct a strong campaign aimed at protecting victims and dealing with perpetrators of gender violence, while working with all the relevant stakeholders. We have a policy in place and are now holding consultations on a draft bill on gender violence that we hope will address our high rates of gender violence.

I would like to say that the regional assistance mission is now in a transitional phase. After 10 years of its regional partnership with a post-conflict country such as ours, our economy has grown and stability has been maintained. The mission's military component will be withdrawn this year. The regional Pacific police force will shift into more of an advisory role, and other components of the partnership will slowly be absorbed into bilateral assistance with various partners.

The role of UN-Women in combating sexual violence remains important, but its task in the Pacific is challenging. It has one inter-country office managing 13 countries. We continue to push for it to establish itself in more countries in the region.

Finally, to answer the question posed in the concept paper (S/2013/335, annex) — yes, the Solomon Islands and the Pacific have a story to tell and a model that tries to address the issue of sexual violence comprehensively through regional cooperation. I would like to close by stating that sustainable peace and stability can be achieved only through embracing all three pillars of sustainable development, and by addressing the security threats connected to climate change by calling for stronger mitigation targets to avoid the possibility that the world will reach a point of no return. Failing that, the threats we see today will continue to increase as States' capacity to respond will become more challenging.