



## **Armed Groups, Government Forces Continue Wielding Sexual Violence as Tool of War Despite Progress in Ending Impunity, Security Council Hears in Day-long Debate**

Member States had “not yet moved from resolutions to lasting solutions”, when it came to addressing the scourge of sexual violence in conflict, the Security Council heard today during an all-day open debate addressing that issue.

Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, briefed the Council, stressing that while significant normative and operational progress had been achieved, it was clear that words on paper had not yet been matched by facts on the ground. In that context, the Council must urgently consolidate progress by ensuring accountability or risk a reversal that would result in wartime rape being once again normalized.

Summarizing some of the findings of the Secretary-General’s report on sexual violence in conflict, she said the crime continued to be employed as a tactic of war and a tool of political repression, attacking and altering the ethnic or religious identity of persecuted groups and changing the demographics of disputed regions. The threat drove forced displacement, inhibited the return of uprooted communities and, through trafficking and sexual exploitation, fuelled a wartime economy, generating revenue for combatants and armed groups.

Meanwhile, she said, stigma and victim blaming gave the weapon of rape its uniquely destructive power, shredding the social fabric, turning victims into outcasts and leaving children conceived as a result of wartime rape at risk of being stateless and susceptible to recruitment, radicalization, trafficking and exploitation.

Also briefing the Council, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said progress had seen sharp reductions in reported cases. However, more must be done, as sexual violence had been one of the major drivers of forced displacement in Myanmar and many other countries in 2018.

Elaborating on the plight of Rohingya women and girls in Myanmar and those fleeing to Bangladesh, Razia Sultana, senior researcher at Kaladan Press, briefed the Council on recent developments. Sharing her own findings that Government troops had raped 300 women and girls in 17 villages in Rakhine State with impunity, she said there was strong evidence that such crimes had been systemically planned and used against her people. Women had been gang raped, tortured and killed by State armed forces for no other reason other than being Rohingya.

Delegates drew attention to some recent positive developments. Various armed groups in Mali had signed a joint communiqué pledging not to employ sexual violence as a weapon, and a similar agreement had been signed in Iraq. In addition, women’s protection advisors deployed to United Nations peacekeeping operations were helping to shape inclusive new policies and laws.

The issue of accountability featured prominently throughout the discussion, with several speakers highlighting access to justice was a means of prevention. Several speakers drew attention to the central role of the International Criminal Court in the fight for accountability as well as the essential duty of Member States to prevent and investigate cases and prosecute perpetrators.

Meanwhile some speakers, including the representative of Canada, speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, called on the Council to include sexual violence as a designation criterion within sanctions regimes, as well as greater efforts to ensure that survivors had access to the full range of livelihood, social, legal, psychosocial and non-discriminatory medical services to promote rehabilitation and reintegration.

Other delegates voiced concern about the impunity enjoyed by terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), in which sexual slavery played a major role. In that connection, a number of representatives expressed dismay that to date no member of Boko Haram or ISIL had yet been prosecuted for such crimes.

Kuwait’s representative noted that the retreat by such armed groups had created challenges in liberated areas, including the reintegration of survivors. In that connection, his Government had pledged \$1 billion of assistance in Iraq in the form of loans and investment to rehabilitate areas liberated from ISIL.

Sharing the perspective of a country that had successfully tackled sexual violence in conflict, Côte d'Ivoire's delegate outlined the progress made after his Government had prioritized the issue, establishing a national strategy and recruiting women to high-level positions in the armed forces. As a result, the number of cases of sexual violence by national forces — which had once numbered over 100 per year — had dropped to zero in 2017.

Underscoring what was possible when political will and institutional structures were put in place, other speakers cited examples of progress in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a former parliamentarian in South Kivu had been convicted in 2017 for the rape of 39 children, as well as legal reforms in Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan that had delinked rape from adultery.

Offering yet another glimmer of hope, the representative of Colombia explained that the role of women had been vital in the implementation of her country's peace agreement. She highlighted the steps her Government had taken to ensure that women's autonomy and empowerment were achieved to shatter cycles of violence, including setting up a group to investigate all cases of sexual violence in conflict and providing reparations to thousands of victims.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Sweden, United States, Ethiopia, France, Bolivia, Poland, Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, United Kingdom, China, Netherlands, Equatorial Guinea, Peru, Liechtenstein, Brazil, Spain, Turkey, Pakistan, Norway (for the Nordic countries), Japan, Mexico, Estonia, Slovakia, Italy, Switzerland, Indonesia, Austria, Belgium, Egypt, Lithuania, Iraq, Nigeria, Jordan, Portugal, Germany, Qatar, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Myanmar, Slovenia, Israel, Sudan, Bangladesh, South Africa, Ireland, Paraguay, Botswana, Croatia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Montenegro, Syria, Bahrain, Morocco, Mali (on behalf of the Human Security Network), Maldives and Argentina, as well as the European Union, African Union, Holy See, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The meeting began at 10:11 a.m. and ended at 6:16 p.m.

#### Opening Remarks

AMINA MOHAMMED, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, said sexual violence had been one of the major drivers of forced displacement in Myanmar and many other countries in 2018. The tactic was also used as a weapon of war and a common method of torturing detainees. While both genders suffered from such crimes, women and girls were most affected, with those at the lowest levels of wealth, health and education being most at risk. Survivors were often forced to live with the resulting health effects and social stigma, and when some bore children resulting from rape, those children were in turn shunned from society.

Describing sexual violence in conflict as a deliberate tactic aimed at undermining social cohesion, she called on Member States to work to prevent such crimes through accountability and deterrence efforts while also recognizing the important role of survivors as agents of change. In that vein, she drew attention to some positive developments, recalling that various armed groups in Mali had signed a joint communiqué pledging not to employ sexual violence as a weapon, and that a similar agreement had been signed in Iraq in March. In addition, women's protection advisors, deployed to many United Nations peacekeeping operations, were engaging parties to conflict to uphold their commitments on that issue and were helping to shape inclusive new policies and laws. Concluding, she emphasized that resolution 2106 (2013) called on all actors — the Council, Member States, parties to conflict and others — to redouble their efforts to address such horrific crimes.

PRAMILA PATTEN, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, said the Secretary-General's latest report on the issue served to measure progress and to inspire and accelerate it. Since the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), the issue had been systematically included in peacekeeping mission mandates, sanctions regimes and ceasefire agreements while being excluded from amnesty provisions. While significant normative and operational progress had been achieved, it was clear that words on paper had not yet been matched by facts on the ground. "We have not yet moved from resolutions to lasting solutions," she said, adding that the Council must urgently consolidate progress by ensuring accountability or risk a reversal that would result in wartime rape being once again normalized. Over the past decade, enhanced political momentum to combat sexual violence had coincided with a confluence of global crises, including mass migration, rising violent extremism and terrorism, the spread of conflict and the proliferation of arms.

Summarizing some of the report's findings, she said sexual violence continued to be employed as a tactic of war and a tool of political repression, attacking and altering the ethnic or religious identity of persecuted groups and changing the demographics of disputed regions. The threat drove forced displacement, inhibited the return of uprooted communities and, through trafficking and sexual exploitation, fuelled a wartime economy, generating revenue for combatants and armed groups. Early marriage spiked where families lacked means of protecting their daughters, leading to further repression. Indeed, sexual violence arose from and reinforced unequal gender relations. Meanwhile, stigma and victim blaming gave the weapon of rape its uniquely destructive power, shredding the social fabric, turning victims into outcasts and leaving children conceived as a result of wartime rape at risk of being stateless and susceptible to recruitment, radicalization, trafficking and exploitation. Despite some landmark cases, mass rape continued to be met with mass impunity, she said, perpetuating a vicious cycle of violence and revenge in many war-torn nations.

However, country-level progress had been achieved, she continued, citing examples. No new cases involving members of the armed forces of Côte d'Ivoire had been recorded in 2017, demonstrating what was possible when political will and risk-mitigation measures were put in place, and several States continued to implement action plans, including the Central African Republic, Guinea, Iraq, Somalia and South Sudan. Colombia had elevated gender justice to the heart of its peace process and ensured that thousands of survivors received reparations. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a former parliamentarian in South Kivu had been convicted in 2017 for the rape of 39 children, committed by his militia. Congolese authorities had also undertaken hundreds of prosecutions. Legal reform in 2017 had delinked rape from adultery and morality crimes, as seen in Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan.

The international community could not lose focus at what was a critical juncture, she said, urging them to keep the "searchlight of international scrutiny" on a historically hidden crime. In that vein, she called on the Security Council to consider establishing a reparation fund for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. She also asked members to take a more operational response to alleviate stigma and to adopt a sustained political resolve and resources equal to the scale of the challenge.

RAZIA SULTANA, senior researcher at Kaladan Press, told the Council that she had been working directly with Rohingya women and girls in refugee camps in Bangladesh since 2014. Speaking on behalf of her people, she said women were fleeing from situations where others had been gang raped, tortured and killed by Myanmar's armed forces for no other reason other than being Rohingya. Since August last year, more than 670,000 Rohingya had fled Myanmar, the largest refugee movement since the Rwanda genocide. While she was grateful to Bangladesh for opening its borders, the international community, especially the Security Council, had failed her people. If the warning signs had not been ignored since 2012, the crisis could have been prevented. Since then, State security forces had committed human rights abuses against her people, limiting their movement and restricting their access to their livelihoods, health care, food and education. Such discrimination against her people had begun in 1982 when they were stripped of citizenship rights, she said, adding that other ethnic minorities had also faced decades of entrenched discrimination, rape and other human rights violations.

The Myanmar army was raping ethnic women with impunity, she said, sharing her own findings that provided evidence of Government troops having raped 300 women and girls in 17 villages in Rakhine State. That was likely only a fraction of the number of women raped. Sexual violence involved hundreds of soldiers across Rakhine State, with strong evidence that the crimes had been systemically planned and used against her people. Genital mutilation was used to terrorize and destroy their means of reproduction, having horrifying implications for the safety of women and girls around the country. The international community and humanitarian agencies needed to scale up protection services to support Rohingya refugees, including mental health care services, sanitation and water conditions. The provision of safe abortions and emergency contraception was also critically low in camps. Highlighting that young women, some as young as age 12, were being trafficked, she said the international community must work to stop trafficking and pressure Myanmar to work with the United Nations fact-finding mission and provide humanitarian access across Rakhine State.

International pressure was needed to end impunity and support legal reforms for all ethnic people in Myanmar, she said. Moreover, the Government of Myanmar must address the issue of Rohingya citizenship and freedom of movement. Her people must be guaranteed a safe return. Finally, the Security Council must refer the situation to the International Criminal Court without delay for its horrific crimes against Rohingya and other ethnic groups. At the same time, it was hypocritical to express horror at violence while also selling arms to Myanmar and seeking licenses to mine its natural resources, she said.

### Statements

ALICE BAH KUHNKE, Minister for Culture and Democracy of Sweden, associating herself with the European Union, Nordic countries and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, said she had met women and girls, men and boys seeking asylum after having fled from horrible atrocities in conflict areas. Violence, oppression and systematic subjugation still marked the daily lives of countless women and girls, as conflict-related sexual brutality traumatized its victims in an effort to undermine and shatter communities and societies. Describing those phenomena as "core security challenges" and therefore a central part of the Council's work, she underlined the link between accountability and prevention. Sweden, when it joined the Council, had set out two overarching priorities: conflict prevention, and women, peace and security.

Recalling that Sweden had since 2014 pursued a feminist policy based on the "four Rs" — rights, representation, resources and "reality check" — she said it used a gender perspective in its foreign policy. The Council must address the gender dynamics of the root causes of conflict, including structural gender inequalities, as a critical element of the instability that hindered efforts to maintain or restore international peace and security. Recalling that in 2017 the first-ever separate sanctions designation criteria had been added for conflict-related sexual violence in the Central African Republic, she said more must be done. Panels of experts must also be mandated to report to sanctions committees on conflict-related sexual violence, and there should be more focus on access to justice and its links to prevention.

KELLEY A. ECKELS-CURRIE (United States) said "we should all be appalled by the level of sexual violence taking place around the world". In Myanmar, sexual violence was used as a tool for the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people in an effort to terrorize, stigmatize and shame them into fleeing from their homes. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, "women and

girls are the battlefield”, with a staggering 27 per cent of Congolese women having experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Today’s debate demonstrated the urgent need for the Council to address important human rights-related issues that were critical to peace and security, she said, voicing regret that its available sanctions regimes had been underutilized. “It is time that Member States actively develop sanctions designations for perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict,” she said, noting that such an approach would help to deter future abuses. In addition, more women should be recruited as uniformed peacekeeping officials, she said, expressing regret that only 4 per cent of those roles were currently filled by women.

MAHLET HAILU GUADEY ([Ethiopia](#)) said the Council should encourage or pressure all parties to conflict to fully comply with international law. Despite progress, extremist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab continued to use sexual violence as a tactic of war. Also deeply troubling were the stigmatization faced by victims, the challenge of their reintegration and the impunity of perpetrators. The three pillar priorities laid out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General should serve as a basis to redouble efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and fight impunity. The Council should give utmost priority to preventing and addressing the root causes of conflict as well as reducing the vulnerabilities of civilians, she said, also voicing support for the Secretary-General’s proposal to include sexual violence as part of sanctions designation criteria to be explored by the Council.

FRANÇOIS DELATTRE ([France](#)), associating himself with the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, expressed horror at the many systematic cases of sexual violence in armed conflict listed in the Secretary-General’s report. In Syria and other conflict zones, those crimes were closely related to restrictions of the freedom of movement. Despite some progress, he expressed concern that to date no member of ISIL or Boko Haram had yet been prosecuted for such crimes. In Somalia, victims faced the double horror of being forced to marry their rapists. Calling on States to implement victim support programmes, he said there must also be a global response to obstacles blocking the realization of women’s rights. Mechanisms must be established to document crimes and, when access to justice was not immediately available, perpetrators must eventually be held accountable. Sexual violence must also be included as designation criteria in all sanctions regimes, and peacekeeping missions must have the necessary resources to fulfil mandates, including the protection of women, which was not an optional activity.

MANSOUR AYYAD SH. A. ALOTAIBI ([Kuwait](#)), highlighting how sexual violence in conflict was linked to terrorism and violent extremism, recalled the Council’s position, as reflected in resolutions 2231 (2015) and 2253 (2015). The Council must hold all perpetrators of such crimes accountable and end impunity. Meanwhile, political missions must include the empowerment of women in conflict situations in their agendas and refer those crimes to the justice system. The retreat by certain armed groups had created challenges in liberated areas, including the reintegration of survivors. The best way to prevent sexual violence was to promote basic freedoms, human rights and political participation while assisting survivors of such violence. In that connection, Kuwait had pledged \$1 billion of assistance in Iraq in the form of loans and investment to rehabilitate areas liberated from ISIL and help them achieve sustainable development, national reconciliation and social justice. He underlined the importance of treating survivors as victims.

Ms. CORDOVA ([Bolivia](#)) said sexual violence in conflict involved a series of crimes against humanity that were irreversible to its victims. Its emotional and physical consequences affected survivors long after wars had ended. The issue was a real threat to international peace and security and an impediment to peace in affected countries. As such, the Council must promote accountability and a zero-tolerance policy, she said. Trafficking was another form of violence, with serious consequences, with victims often not receiving the support they needed. The increase in sexual violence in refugee camps and during displacement was also a major concern, as evidenced by the situation on the border of Bangladesh and Myanmar. Empowerment of women and access to justice and accountability were key to fighting sexual violence in conflict, however the root causes of conflict needed to be addressed to remove structural inequalities and address poverty. Prevention was also an important tool, she said, stressing the importance of increased cooperation between the United Nations and civil society. At the national level, Governments must promote the political empowerment of women, she said, citing encouraging progress made in Afghanistan and South Sudan. While tools were available to deal with sexual violence in conflict, an even greater commitment by Council and the wider United Nations system was needed.

PAWEL RADOMSKI ([Poland](#)), aligning himself with the European Union, expressed outrage at persistent reports of sexual violence in armed conflict, which constituted a flagrant and unacceptable violation of international and humanitarian law. Underscoring the lack of accountability to victims, he said attention must focus on, among other things, the economic empowerment of women. Proper funding was required to address the needs of survivors and carry out initiatives that could counter conditions to foster such an environment. In that regard, peacebuilding and recovery funding still largely ignored women’s roles. The stigmatization of victims was also widespread and the majority of victims did not report such crimes, contributing to a culture of impunity and preventing them from getting appropriate health care and legal assistance. Many children conceived through rape were ostracized, deprived of fundamental human rights and more likely to be recruited by armed groups. Calling attention to sexual violence against men and boys, he said the devastating impact on them and their families needed to be discussed in the Council, noting that limited statistics and cultural taboos vastly understated the number of male victims.

DMITRY A. POLYANSKIY ([Russian Federation](#)) said much had been achieved in the decade since the Council had begun to consider the issue, and it was clear that it was a serious crime in itself and not a collateral effect of conflict. Voicing concern over the “shadow economies” of terrorist groups such as ISIL, in which sexual slavery played a major role, he warned that the Special Representative must not deviate by addressing such issues as discrimination or migration, but instead focus on her very specific mandate. Expressing concern over attempts to broadly interpret the scope of the Council’s mandate, he said any overreach could lead it to stray from its purpose and encroach on other United Nations bodies. Concerned about a shift in the focus of the Secretary-General’s report towards human rights-related issues, he cited unhealthy attempts to use the issue of sexual violence in conflict to pursue narrow political aims. Noting that crimes by ISIL and other terrorist groups were barely mentioned in the 2018 report’s chapter on Syria, he wondered how the fighters and terrorists would react to that lack of courage and warned that they might be emboldened by the Council’s lack of attention to their crimes.

The situation on the ground in Syria had changed significantly, he said, warning against any biased or subjective approach to the Secretary-General’s report, which would only serve to undermine the work of his Special Representative. The policy of zero tolerance should not be applied selectively, and personnel of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or peacekeeping missions must never be exempted from it, he said, expressing concern that France had sought to “sweep under the table” such cases committed by French soldiers in the Central African Republic, with no one ultimately held accountable. “This can only cause outrage,” he said, recalling that when the Council had voted this month to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), the United States delegation had refused to address the question of sexual violence crimes committed by NGOs accredited with the United Nations.

BERNARD TANOHO-BOUTCHOUE ([Côte d’Ivoire](#)) said sexual violence in armed conflict had disastrous physical, psychological, and economic consequences for its victims, as well as on the situation of peace and security for the community as a whole. Those crimes were used by parties as a strategy of war and terrorism, and were increasingly a lucrative activity that fuelled conflict, he said, noting that they were often used to force entire communities to flee their homes and leave behind their assets. Following Côte d’Ivoire’s 2010-2011 post-electoral crisis, the country had been put on the list annexed to the Secretary-General’s report on sexual violence in armed conflict. It had been delisted in 2017 in light of positive progress and increasing stability. Immediately following the end of its civil conflict, the Government had made the fight against sexual violence a priority and established a national strategy. Moreover, the armed forces’ code of conduct had been overhauled and women were now recruited to high-level positions previously reserved for men. As a result, the number of cases of sexual violence by national forces — which had once numbered over 100 per year — had dropped to zero in 2017.

KAIRAT UMAROV ([Kazakhstan](#)) said sexual violence and human trafficking were being used as tactics of war and sources of income by armed groups, terrorist organizations and transnational organized crime networks. Concerted and well-coordinated cross-national interventions must stamp out the practice. However, States bore the primary responsibility for enacting legislation to respond to sexual violence. Victims must receive full, competent and speedy attention. As such, cooperation with religious leaders, civil society and local communities was important in changing extremist narratives, shifting the stigma of sexual violence from victims to perpetrators as well as promoting education and creating awareness about women’s empowerment. In cooperation with Japan and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Kazakhstan had launched a project for gender equality in Afghanistan, focused on policy support and capacity development, and was also contributing to the United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women.

KAREN PIERCE ([United Kingdom](#)) said sexual violence was a common problem that all Member States must be committed to mitigating and eliminating. The United Kingdom was committed to preventing and responding to such crimes, having undertaken an initiative demonstrating how central eliminating sexual violence was to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Agreeing that sexual violence was a violation of international humanitarian law that applied to non-State actors, she highlighted the importance of educating girls, who were disproportionately affected, and noted the United Kingdom’s investment in girls’ education globally. Justice was critical to prevention efforts. While progress had been made in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, much more needed to be done, she said, pointing to the gap in justice and accountability Kosovo. She urged Member States to implement the international protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict.

WU HAITAO ([China](#)) said the current international security situation remained challenging and vulnerable groups such as women and girls were bearing the brunt. He condemned the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and any act of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls, saying the international community must promote the peaceful resolution of armed conflict to root out the breeding ground for such violence. Council resolutions on women, peace and security must be implemented earnestly. Support was also needed to help countries to build capacities and promote equality through development. Member States must actively provide those countries with assistance to fully realize women’s empowerment. There was also a need to crack down on terrorism and transnational crime while scaling up border control. More broadly, the Council must fulfil its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security and coordinate with other United Nations bodies to address issues of women, peace and security within the purview of each entity’s respective expertise. For its part, China would work to contribute to the early elimination of sexual violence in conflict.

LISE GREGOIRE VAN HAAREN ([Netherlands](#)), associating herself with the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, condemned the cruelty Rohingya women and girls faced both before and after fleeing their homes in Rakhine State. The Netherlands was committed to the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and on sexual harassment. Moreover, sanctions had the potential to protect the safety and lives of millions of women and girls in conflict areas, she said, welcoming the recent inclusion of that criterion in the sanctions regime for the Central African Republic. For those conflict-affected countries for which no specific United Nations sanctions regime yet existed, such as Myanmar, she urged the Council to consider adopting such regimes, allowing for a special designation criterion on sexual violence. However, sanctions were not an alternative to the prosecution of crimes punishable under international law. As such, Member States must ensure such prosecutions and facilitate reparations under international humanitarian law.

ANATOLIO NDONG MBA ([Equatorial Guinea](#)), deploring all forms of sexual violence and its use as a weapon of war, described those crimes as “the worst assault on human dignity”. The Secretary-General’s report described some progress in combating such crimes, as well as the appointment of the United Nations first victim defender. Nevertheless, sexual violence remained rampant in many conflicts, perpetrated by terrorists, organized criminal groups and others. The widespread movement of populations exacerbated those problems, with many civilians finding themselves trapped in the crossfire or targeted by human traffickers and other criminals. Noting that national Governments bore the primary responsibility for addressing those crimes and implementing Council resolutions, he warned against any policies that would violate States’ sovereignty. Spotlighting the importance of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union’s 2063 Agenda — both of which had a strong focus on people and on empowering women — he said countries must support women’s participation in efforts to resolve conflicts and build peace. Deterring sexual violence and empowering women were parts of Equatorial Guinea’s national development plans.

GUSTAVO MEZA-CUADRA ([Peru](#)), Council President for April, spoke in his national capacity, underlining the United Nations important role in addressing sexual violence in conflict. The use of those crimes against populations should be viewed as a threat to international peace and security, he said, calling for a comprehensive policy to address that scourge that included efforts to ensure equality, empowerment and identifying root causes. All perpetrators must be held accountable and all obstacles to relevant investigations must be removed. “We cannot ignore the stigma and the fear of victims,” he said, noting that many aggressors were in fact members of security forces. Peru had in place a national plan of action and it prioritized the inclusion of Peruvian women as Blue Helmets. All peacekeepers must be adequately trained in the protection of civilians against sexual violence, he said, emphasizing that those responsible for sexual crimes should never benefit from any forms of amnesty in efforts to resolve conflicts.

OMAR ALGHABRA, Member of Parliament of [Canada](#), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, said it was disconcerting that no member of ISIL had yet been prosecuted for sexual violence crimes. Calling on the Council to include sexual violence as a designation criterion within sanctions regimes, he said relevant sanctions committees should also be supported by dedicated gender and sexual violence expertise, drawing on information from the Special Representative. Greater efforts must ensure that survivors had access to the full range of livelihood, social, legal, psychosocial and non-discriminatory medical services to promote rehabilitation and reintegration. Condemning cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations and international assistance as well as sexual harassment within the Organization, he encouraged the Secretary-General to ensure that common standards were developed and implemented.

In his national capacity, he said Canada had made a commitment in 2017 to provide assistance to more than 1,200 vulnerable Yazidi women, children and other survivors of ISIL by resettling them in Canada. Women in conflict stood as courageous survivors of violence, not as victims. “We must harness their resilience, their determination and their innovative solutions to find ways to end conflict,” he said. Turning to the plight of Rohingya women and girls in Myanmar and Bangladesh, he said Canada had already sanctioned Major General Maung Maung Soe under the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act. However, even after fleeing Myanmar, many women and girls continued to face gender-based violence. “Rape has been used as a weapon of war against the Rohingya,” he said, noting that through its feminist international assistance policy, his Government was supporting the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to rapidly deploy experts while ensuring international organizations and transitional justice processes were able to investigate and prosecute such violence.

MYRIAM OEHRI ([Liechtenstein](#)) expressed regret that despite the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), patterns of sexual violence remained a sad reality in many conflict situations, and effective responses remained rare. Such patterns were often embedded in, and compounded by, underlying structural conditions such as inequality, gender-based discrimination and the violation of rights of minorities. The situation of the Rohingya community in Myanmar was especially critical, with many of the 700,000 civilians fleeing to Bangladesh as a result of physical, psychosocial and sexual assault. In Syria, sexual violence continued to be used as a tactic of war with rampant impunity, she said, describing it as shocking that not a single member of ISIL had been prosecuted for such crimes. In that regard, she drew attention to several important recent convictions, including former Vice-President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo by the International Criminal Court and of Jean-Paul Akayesu by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the latter being a landmark decision in that it had found that sexual violence could amount to genocide.

FREDERICO S. DUQUE ESTRADA MEYER ([Brazil](#)) said prevention constituted the most effective way of pushing back against sexual and gender-based violence. As such, higher numbers of women in peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding initiatives would serve as a springboard for moving that prevention agenda forward in conflict and post-conflict situations. Brazil had redoubled its own efforts to increase the numbers of female candidates for both civilian and military posts in missions and was hosting a related United Nations course. The issue of access to justice for all victims remained at the heart of efforts to respond to the threat of sexual violence in conflict. The Council must also establish robust mandates, ensure that they provided effective protections for women and punish perpetrators. Brazil had been supporting such efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and Guinea-Bissau, he said, adding Brazil had in 2017 launched its first national action plan on women, peace and security.

GERARDUS VAN DEN AKKER ([European Union](#)) said conflict-related sexual violence was a crime and a violation of human rights. While awareness had increased about the prevalence and hideousness of such crimes, and normative progress had been achieved, countless women, men, girls and boys still lived under constant threat. Those living in areas plagued by conflict and violent extremism had the most to fear. Behind every statistic, there was a life and a person.

For its part, the European Union had taken concrete action to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence, with an emphasis on a holistic approach that recognized that sexual and gender-based violence were in part the result of gender inequalities, women's and girls' subordinated positions and patriarchal contexts. The issue of stigma being placed on victims, rather than on the perpetrator, must also be analysed and addressed. He called for practical steps to be taken towards the effective prevention of and protection from conflict-related sexual violence. It was unacceptable that most incidents continued to be met with impunity. Specifically, it was a failure that not a single member of ISIL or Boko Haram had yet been prosecuted for sexual offences, he said, noting that victims and witnesses of sexual violence must be ensured access to impartial tribunals and reparations, while their safety was sufficiently addressed.

MARÍA EMMA MEJÍA VÉLEZ ([Colombia](#)) said the peace agreement in her country was a necessary precursor to ensure a peaceful and harmonious society. The role of women was vital in the agreement's implementation, and as such, a special gender unit had been established that sought to offer rural women better living conditions and economic autonomy. If such autonomy and empowerment were achieved, that could shatter the cycles of violence to which they were vulnerable. Colombia's peace agreement encompassed judicial and non-judicial mechanisms and, in September, those institutions had elected members. For the first time, 28 of 51 judges in the special peace jurisdiction were women, 1 of whom was presiding over the tribunal. Also, the new director of the prosecution unit was setting up a special group to investigate all cases of sexual violence in the conflict, she said, recalling that 51 per cent of all registered victims of the country's conflict had been women. In that way, Colombia had established a differentiated approach to respond to and provide reparations to victims.

MARIA BASSOLS DELGADO ([Spain](#)) urged the international community to address the root causes of sexual violence in conflict situations. "We must fight against stigmatization," she said, highlighting that the fear of ostracism was even greater when the victim was a man or boy. In order to achieve the implementation of related resolutions, it was essential to have specific knowledge from the expert panels of sanctions committees, mediators, the military, police and humanitarian actors. The Council must include specific criteria for sexual violence in all sanctions regimes and follow up at a later date. For its part, Spain was strengthening the training of its security sector and providing training to Colombia and other States. "Current impunity feeds future impunity," she said, noting that cases and judgments, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, had contributed to victims having greater confidence in justice.

GÜVEN BEGEÇ ([Turkey](#)) said the empowerment of the 1.6 million Syrian women and girls living in Turkey was of crucial importance his country. "This is why we exert every effort to provide security and safety for them," he said. Turning to the situation with the Rohingya, he said the Secretary-General's findings were "most disturbing" and urged the international community to create the necessary conditions for peaceful coexistence and safe return of refugees. That included ending all types of violence, including sexual violence, and giving humanitarian agencies immediate access to people in need. On the issue of human trafficking, he said an increasing number of protracted conflicts, forced displacement and humanitarian emergencies had created an environment conducive to that crime, also triggering sexual violence and the exploitation of women and girls.

MALEEHA LODHI ([Pakistan](#)) voiced concern that complicated geopolitical realities surrounding ongoing conflicts and divisions among Council members had allowed some perpetrators of sexual violence crimes to continue carrying out those heinous atrocities with impunity. "From Myanmar to our own neighbourhood, the world continues to watch in horror as several State and non-State actors employ rape and sexual abuse as a deliberate policy to subdue and oppress entire populations," she said, urging the Council to focus on addressing the root causes of conflict in order to remove the grounds where such crimes bred. She also called for mechanisms to independently investigate and verify reports emerging from conflict situations where sexual violence occurred. Concrete steps were needed to enhance the capacity of national institutions and improve criminal justice systems in countries facing armed conflict. Moreover, victims required protection, rehabilitation, justice and redress. As one of the world's top troop-contributing countries, Pakistan set high standards for the personnel taking part in United Nations peacekeeping missions, including by providing specific training modules to help peacekeepers respond effectively to protect civilians from sexual violence.

HALVOR SÆTRE ([Norway](#)), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, noted that violent extremists often targeted women as part of their strategy, with sexual violence often seen as an inevitable, if regrettable, consequence of war. "This attitude encourages impunity for perpetrators and silences survivors," he said, adding that while the International Criminal Court played a central role in the fight for accountability, States bore the primary duty to prevent and investigate cases and prosecute perpetrators. In mediation efforts, the Nordic countries worked to ensure that victims were heard and amnesty for sexual crimes was rejected. The bloc had also contributed several specialized sexual and gender-based violence teams to United Nations police operations. Moreover, it was developing a handbook for United Nations operations on how to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence. Full and effective women's participation at all levels of decision-making would prevent and efficiently address conflict-related sexual violence. As such, the call to action, national focal points for women, peace and security and the emerging alliance of networks of women mediators constituted important steps in the right direction.

TOSHIYA HOSHINO ([Japan](#)) said economic and political empowerment was a powerful way to prevent and deter sexual violence. "Empowering women enhances the resilience of families, communities, regions and beyond," he said. The 2017 liberation of territories and the release or escape of women and girls formerly held by armed groups had shed a light on the cruel reality surrounding women and girls in conflict. Highlighting that women and men were affected differently during wartime, he said a gender-responsive rule of law and justice must be ensured in conflict and post-conflict settings. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was one of the countries where Japan had provided training, mentoring, infrastructure and technical support to judicial investigations. From 1 January to 31 October 2017, 1,726 sexual and gender-based violence cases had been registered by those units and so far 643 judgments had been issued, he said, adding that the sooner justice and accountability came, the sooner the healing could start.

JUAN SANDOVAL MENDIOLEA ([Mexico](#)) said sexual violence in conflict could be prevented if the international community used its "entire toolkit" to empower women and girls and boost their access to justice. "Any effort to address sexual violence in conflict must capture the virtuous cycle between sustainable peace and rule of law," he said, noting that the systematic exclusion of girls from formal education continued to sow the seeds of marginalization and exclusion. "Empowered women who are respected in society are the bedrock of healthy communities." In Mexico, a national programme sought to ensure women enjoyed all of their rights. The Government was working to coordinate efforts with local authorities, businesses, civil society and academia. Women and girls must participate in reconciliatory and mediation efforts. Meanwhile, he condemned sexual abuse by United Nations peacekeeping missions. "There can be no healthy society when the needs of half of the population are ignored," he said.

SVEN JÜRGENSON ([Estonia](#)) said sexual violence was preventable and actions must be taken to do so while also supporting victims by providing adequate services so that they could rebuild their lives. Survivors must be provided with the option to document their cases for future accountability processes. The effective investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes was critical. Estonia's comprehensive national plan had helped to reduce domestic violence, laying out concrete activities to reduce and prevent sexual violence. Emphasizing the role of civil society in such efforts, he said women's organizations had the ability to provide new insight and valuable data. It was therefore of utmost importance that NGOs had larger platforms at the United Nations.

MICHAL MLYNÁR ([Slovakia](#)) said that as a signatory of the voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, his country had encouraged other States to show solidarity with victims by signing that agreement. At the same time, when gender-related crimes were being committed, the Council should look more closely at referring cases to the International Criminal Court. Moreover, the solid case law from international criminal tribunals relating to sexual violence could and should be used in national proceedings against alleged perpetrators. More broadly, justice systems, including investigative bodies, must adopt non-discriminatory and gender-sensitive approaches, while legal aid must be made easily accessible to victims.

ANDREA BIAGINI ([Italy](#)), associating himself with the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, emphasized that women and girls fleeing conflict must be afforded protection while in transit and at their destination. Conflict-related sexual violence could be prevented and more effectively addressed through the empowerment of women and ensuring accountability for crimes perpetrated. The empowerment of women remained essential to any strategy that aimed to help women take control of their lives and prevent them from falling prey to sexual violence. The Mediterranean region was currently facing a number of threats, including conflict, violent extremism, transnational organized crime, human trafficking and humanitarian emergencies. In that context, women could effectively help countries prevent conflicts and strengthen national reconciliation processes if stakeholders ensured an inclusive perspective on issues of security, justice and governance. In addition to Governments making efforts to strengthen accountability, the Council could impose targeted sanctions against individuals who had committed sexual violence.

ALEXANDRA ELENA BAUMANN ([Switzerland](#)) said access to justice remained a major challenge for all survivors of sexual violence, where judicial systems were weak or inexistent. "The widespread fear of reprisals and stigma discourages people subjected to sexual violence from coming forward," she added. Switzerland trained police and armed forces on how to take a victim-centred approach when handling cases of sexual violence. "Often the first step is to increase trust in the police," she



said, highlighting cases in Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal and Tajikistan. In those countries, Switzerland had worked with local police to deal with sexual and gender-based violence. Noting the connection between the lack of gender equality in a society and readiness to take up arms, she said women's economic empowerment was also essential for equal participation in peacebuilding. All family members had a role in championing women's financial independence. "Men also need empowerment and education in order to transform traditional gender relations," she said.

INA H. KRISNAMURTHI ([Indonesia](#)) said more resources must be directed towards preventing conflict in order to rebalance the peace and security approach, which had in the past been focused on responding instead. In that regard, women must be empowered to access the policymaking process, allowing them to address their grievances and make contributions to society. Conflict prevention must be advanced through improved dissemination of shared knowledge and experiences of women ex-combatants, peacekeepers and negotiators. Women's basic capacities, such as literacy and economic skills, must also be strengthened. As such, her country had been sharing its best practices and experiences in empowering women in leadership through South-South and triangular cooperation. "Women, peace and security should not be reduced as a women's issue," she said, noting that the participation of men and women was required to achieve gender equality and support a safer community.

JAN KICKERT ([Austria](#)), associating himself with the European Union, said patterns of violence against women and girls in minority communities were embedded in underlying structural conditions such as discrimination and inequality. Early warning and awareness-raising measures to tackle those issues were essential. More must be done to counter impunity and combat and prevent sexual violence. "Women and girls are kidnapped, held captive as sex slaves and traded like goods or animals," he said, emphasizing that all perpetrators, including Da'esh and Boko Haram fighters, must be held accountable. Highlighting Austria's contribution to investigating and prosecuting international crimes committed in Syria and Iraq, he condemned reports of sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly by United Nations personnel. "It is important that every woman or girl who has experienced sexual violence is recognized," he said.

MARC PECSTEEN DE BUYTSWERVE ([Belgium](#)) said that based on the landmark adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), the Council had passed resolution 1820 (2008), crossing a long-awaited threshold in the fight against sexual violence in conflict. In July 2017, Belgium had adopted a third national action plan on women, peace and security, aimed at strengthening the status of women in pre- and post-conflict areas. The plan was being implemented nationally and internationally alongside partner countries and groups, with annual progress reports submitted to Parliament. The women, peace and security agenda must be incorporated in all peacekeeping and conflict management initiatives. As such, he welcomed its explicit incorporation in initiatives announced in December between the European Union and NATO, encouraging other regional initiatives to explicitly incorporate the issue into their mandates as well.

FATMAALZAHRAA HASSAN ABDELAZIZ ABDELKAWY ([Egypt](#)) expressed concern about the lack of accountability vis-à-vis sexual violence against women and girls in armed conflict areas by terrorist groups such as ISIL and Boko Haram. She welcomed the work of the United Nations team of experts in cooperation with specialized agencies, in particular with regard to capacity-building for States undergoing conflict. In terms of increasing the number of women protection advisors, since 2009, Egypt had contributed female members of police and military in Sudan, Western Sahara and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Training curricula for all peacekeepers should include dealing with sexual violence. As such, the Cairo Regional Center for Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping had included the topics of combating sexual violence and armed conflict in its pre-deployment training of Egyptian troops taking part in peacekeeping, while offering the same to civil, military and police forces from other Arab and African States engaged in such operations.

AUDRA PLEPYTĖ ([Lithuania](#)), associating herself with the European Union and Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, said weak State structures and the climate of impunity continued to exacerbate sexual violence. Women in remote areas were particularly at risk as they lacked access to adequate reporting, justice and accountability mechanisms. Promoting the rule of law and providing assistance to Governments was essential, while international justice mechanisms played a critical role. Victims must have access to justice to ensure their reintegration to society and economic empowerment. "Even the best tools won't tackle sexual violence in conflict if women continued to remain on the sidelines," she said, adding that all Member States must redouble efforts to empower all women and girls to become actors rather than victims.

MOHAMMED HUSSEIN BAHR ALULOOM ([Iraq](#)) said some of the most horrible terrorist organizations and gangs had abducted children and women, enslaving, raping and trafficking them. Iraq and the United Nations had joined efforts to combat sexual violence and bring perpetrators to justice. Along with international support, Iraq was documenting and gathering evidence of such crimes, which would allow Iraqi judicial actors to ensure the accountability of Da'esh perpetrators. A safe haven had been built for victims of sexual violence, he said, commending the role of the Office of the Special Representative in that endeavour. Many partners had contributed to and supported the fight against all terrorist organizations, he said, emphasizing that perpetrators must be held accountable in the rebuilding of Iraq.

SAMSON SUNDAY ITEGBOJE ([Nigeria](#)) condemned the heinous activities of Boko Haram, particularly in his country's north-eastern region. Recalling the importance of resolution 1325 (2000), he said the African Union had proven to be a useful platform for advancing the role of women in its Agenda 2063. Moreover, the Economic Community of West African

States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Office for West Africa had developed an integrated plan of action to implement that resolution, recognizing the role of women in peacebuilding efforts and rebuilding post-conflict societies. Building on those subregional efforts, Nigeria had launched a national action plan, reflecting the Government's commitment to enhancing the direct participation of women and girls. Experiences in the Lake Chad region provided evidence that terrorism could be defeated with determined collaboration. For its part, Nigeria had implemented several related legal remedies, including the diligent prosecution of more than 200 detained Boko Haram terrorists, as well as reintegration and rehabilitation programmes to meet the needs of sexual violence victims.

SAMAR SAMIR SUKKAR ([Jordan](#)) recalled that in areas of Iraq that had been under ISIL control, women and girls — particularly Yazidis and other minority women — had been subjected to human rights violations. The United Nations must continue its follow-up and monitoring under all mechanisms for women's protection. Along with Finland, Jordan had been a co-facilitator of the sixth review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Although Jordan was located in one of the most tumultuous regions of the world, it had remained an oasis of security and stability. However, it was acting to pre-empt such issues, having stepped up national efforts to support the country's democratic changes. Refugees were the main victims of terrorism and should not be stigmatized. Instead, they must be helped so they could live in a dignified way and not become victims of terrorist ideologies themselves. As such, Jordan had launched a national plan from 2018 to 2021 to implement resolution 1325 (2000). In particular, female refugees needed special protection and Jordan was addressing that through health and security services.

FRANCISCO DUARTE LOPES ([Portugal](#)) said persistent barriers that prevented reporting on wartime sexual violence must be addressed, as it was one of the least reported of all crimes. Portugal was focusing on national training programmes on gender equality and combating violence against women and girls. He emphasized the need to work with civil society as they often played an instrumental role in ensuring the full implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. Civil society often complemented work done by military, security and civilian personnel in conflict and post-conflict settings. It was also often an essential element to prevent and report crimes and to alert the international community to such crimes, while playing a role in restoring the internal stability of States.

FATIMA KYARI MOHAMMED, Permanent Observer of the [African Union](#), said the African Union Commission was fully committed to justice at local, national and continental levels. The African Union had over the years developed strategies to "answer the call" to better ensure the protection of civilians. Outlining several strategies, she said protocols and laws for addressing sexual violence were in place, with 22 African countries having adopted national action plans to specifically address gender-based violence in conflict.

The African Union's office on women, peace and security had also taken initiatives to bridge the gap between policy and implementation, she said. In addition, the African Union continued its efforts to enhance the agency of women in peace processes and the key paths to peace, security and development, including the creation of several networks in partnership with the United Nations. Turning to more positive developments, she said the African Women Leaders Network had recorded important milestones on the ground, including in Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. "It is a network of and for women and for action," she said.

CHRISTOPH HEUSGEN ([Germany](#)) called the threat and use of sexual violence as a strategy to terrorize and collectively punish the Rohingya community in Myanmar one of the most outrageous developments of the last year. He urged that country's authorities to begin a structured dialogue with the Special Representative about assisting the survivors and ensuring accountability, and called on the Council to make those key issues in its upcoming trip to Myanmar. He also welcomed the Special Representative's first visit to Sudan. Nonetheless, the culture of silence regarding sexual violence in Darfur remained deeply concerning. The Government must continue to strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations and grant the Special Representative and other entities unrestricted access to survivors. In addition, accountability for sexual violence in past conflicts was also crucial, including for the crimes committed in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Because accountability for all grave human rights violations was not just an end in itself, but also a means for prevention, reconciliation and deterrence, he urged the Council to include sexual violence as a designation criterion in its sanctions regimes. Legal mechanisms should be implemented to provide justice, he stressed, urging all Member States to put survivors at the centre of their work.

ALYA AHMED SAIF AL-THANI ([Qatar](#)) said national and international legislation must be implemented to ensure judicial prosecution for criminals. Qatar had promoted such rights economically and politically and was seeking to achieve gender equality. As stipulated in resolution 2106 (2013), in order to address the link between human trafficking and sexual violence, it was important to tackle the root causes of conflict that triggered such crimes, including unemployment and poverty. Qatar had invested more than \$2 billion to address such issues and had ratified a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. That initiative was aimed at boosting youth capacity and strengthening the labour market in Arab and Islamic countries in order to help mitigate violent extremism. Sexual violence was used as a tool of war, she noted, adding that, in light of such practices in Syria, Qatar had contributed to investigating such crimes by

setting up and creating the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

EDUARD FESKO (Ukraine) said the Council must continue to prioritize implementing existing resolutions, in particular to overcome gaps that had been identified by the 2015 global study on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). Ukraine's national action plan from 2016 to 2020 to implement that resolution aimed at achieving greater participation by women in decision-making, especially in terms of national security, defence and peacemaking. The recently adopted programme for the restoration and development of peace in Ukraine's eastern regions was an important element in overcoming the consequences of the Russian Federation's military aggression. That conflict had hit women hard in the currently occupied regions, resulting in widespread human rights violations as outlined in reports by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Unfortunately, the Russian Federation continued to ignore the thematic report on conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine, he said, reiterating his delegation's request to include references to the situation of Ukrainian women and children affected by the conflict in Donbas region in all of the Secretary-General's relevant thematic reports.

LANA ZAKI NUSSEIBEH (United Arab Emirates) said resolutions that had sought to strengthen the United Nations' response to sexual violence in conflict had fallen short through lack of implementation. No member of ISIL had been prosecuted for sexual violence offenses to date, sending a dangerous message to groups that utilized such crimes as a tactic of terror. In terms of the Rohingya people's situation, she said the international community must ensure accountability for its victims who had been unacceptably targeted for their religion or ethnicity. Turning to gender equality and women's empowerment, she said it formed one of the three pillars of her Government's foreign assistance strategy. Mainstreaming those ideals would prevent sexual violence in conflict by creating stable, tolerant and prosperous societies. With her Government's support, the United Nations team of experts had carried out its Council mandate to strengthen States' capacity to address sexual violence in conflict.

HAU DO SUAN (Myanmar) said that his Government was striving to build a peaceful and democratic nation after decades of military rule, isolation and internal armed conflicts. Myanmar was currently drafting a law that would protect women from violence, including sexual abuse, domestic assault and workplace harassment. He expressed regret that the Secretary-General's report, while noting important steps taken by Myanmar to protect the rights of women and children, had included the Tatmadaw (Myanmar armed forces) in its annex. Myanmar had made genuine efforts to engage constructively with the Office of the Special Representative and did not condone any human rights abuses. The recent sentencing of seven military personnel to 10 years in prison was a clear demonstration of the Government's strong commitment to the rule of law. Severe legal action had been taken against perpetrators. Members of the armed forces were obliged to follow a military code of conduct. He rejected the use of phrases such as "ethnic cleansing" or "genocide" in reference to the situation in Rakhine State. Such irresponsible accusations were based on one-sided allegations and fake news.

DARJA BAVDAŽ KURET (Slovenia) recalled the historic judgments in the Bemba and [Bosco] Ntaganda cases, which had confirmed that the rape and sexual slavery of children by armed groups' members could be defined as war crimes under the Rome Statute. However, States must remain at the forefront of preventing and ending such violence. Her delegation was addressing the correlation of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence in two draft strategic documents to be adopted in 2018. As such, the new action plan on the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security for the period 2018-2020 was devoted to accountability, education and training. She also noted important achievements in terms of education and training systematically introduced throughout her country's armed forces. In addition, in 2015, a gender advisor in the general staff of the armed forces had been established as a permanent position.

NOA FURMAN (Israel), associating herself with the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, said the international community had a collective responsibility to support women recently escaped or liberated from territories formerly held by armed or terrorist groups. She recounted the stories of several individuals, including a Yazidi woman from Iraq, who had been held captive and raped daily by ISIL. While such groups, also including Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and Al-Qaida, used sexual violence as a terror tactic, the Special Representative's recent report revealed that others — including the Syrian armed forces and intelligence services — were also guilty of such savage practices. Impunity must not be tolerated, she stressed, calling for stronger laws, more stringent enforcement mechanisms, tougher penalties for offenders and the provision of safe havens and support for victims. There must also be no impunity for sexual violence committed by United Nations peacekeepers, sent to protect local populations, who instead abused their positions and violated the most basic human rights.

BERNARDITO CLEOPAS AUZA, Permanent Observer for the Holy See, said greater resources and focus must be dedicated towards conflict prevention, with attention given to ensuring that women's voices were heard. In peacekeeping missions, host countries must be helped to prioritize the prevention of violence against women during conflicts. Heightened attention and efforts to prevent such violence must be sustained in post-conflict situations as well. With the goal of eliminating the

root causes of conflict, the international community must actively help post-conflict countries to promote education, economic and social development. In that regard, the Catholic Church had a long history of emphasizing access to quality education for young women and girls, who constituted the majority of students in Catholic educational institutions. That was particularly true in regions where women and girls still suffered discrimination and in areas suffering from ongoing conflict.

MAGDI AHMED MOFADAL ELNOUR ([Sudan](#)), associating himself with the African Union, said the heinous crime of sexual violence in conflict required a comprehensive approach and coordination among all stakeholders. Calling for stronger prevention and efforts, including mediation and the imposition of sanctions on those who obstructed peace, he said cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations would also be critical. Urging Member States to support the victims' reparation fund and work to empower women, he also drew attention to the need to address root causes of conflict; provide victims with access to health care and psychological support; and pay more attention to the issue of sexual violence committed by peacekeepers. Outlining Sudan's national policies, including the appointment of a new prosecutor to ensure justice and hold perpetrators accountable, he recalled that Special Representative Patten had visited Sudan in February, at which time she had met with stakeholders and visited refugee camps in north and west Darfur. That visit was proof that Sudan was engaged in a constructive dialogue with the international community and that normalcy had returned after an exceptional 15 years of conflict. Nevertheless, he voiced concern over the contents of paragraph 72 of the Secretary-General's report, which alleged that Sudanese border guards had committed crimes involving sexual violence. That was impossible because no such guards had existed in many years.

TAREQ MD ARIFUL ISLAM ([Bangladesh](#)) called the challenges faced by displaced Rohingya women and girls in Bangladesh "a race against time". There remained considerable unmet needs in terms of providing humanitarian assistance and protection to the displaced, and reproductive health care and services to survivors of sexual violence. He called on community leaders and service providers to help affected women and girls come forward and articulate their needs, adding that concerns over stigma must be addressed. The Security Council must be in a position to gather further insights into the possibilities for the Rohingyas' voluntary repatriation during their forthcoming visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh. The culture of impunity often surrounding conflict-related sexual violence also perpetuated a vicious cycle. Against the backdrop of a crisis faced by the Rohingya women and girls, Bangladesh was working to develop a plan to protect them and ensure their inclusion in peace and security mechanisms.

OYAMA MGOBOZI ([South Africa](#)) said systemic and widespread sexual violence was one of the most despicable acts of evil that occurred during conflict. Women and girls continued to be disproportionately affected by conflict situations, particularly regarding sexual abuse and violence. Many survivors bore not only the physical scars, but also hidden trauma and unwarranted stigma. He encouraged the Council to address the risk factors and early warning signs of systemic sexual violence. Underscoring the importance of deploying a greater number of female peacekeepers, he called on Member States to support the inclusion of such posts in the peacekeeping operation mandates. For its part, South Africa had one of the largest contingents of female peacekeepers deployed in United Nations peacekeeping missions. Allowing women to talk to other women about their experiences created a more conducive and safe environment for women to report instances of sexual abuse. Access to justice and legal recourse was also essential to peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives.

GERALDINE BYRNE NASON ([Ireland](#)) said women had made a critical difference to peace and conflict resolution in her country. Underlining the need to address conflict-related sexual violence, she said, "we are ashamed that women and girls are routinely used as a currency of conflict". The Security Council must be consistent and timely in its use of sanctions against perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence. Rural women were particularly vulnerable as they often lived beyond the reach of law enforcement and protection. They were also more vulnerable to displacement stemming from conflict. She outlined various measures taken by Ireland to mainstream women, peace and security in its policies and to ensure the strict enforcement of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse. Among those steps, engaging men and boys was critical to preventing sexual violence in conflict.

JULIO CÉSAR ARRIOLA RAMÍREZ ([Paraguay](#)) outlined the prominent role women had played in his country's peacekeeping contingent, more than 100 troops to six United Nations peacekeeping missions. Based on that experience, he underscored the importance of specialized training for troops, including on the prevention of sexual violence in conflict, which soldiers now received prior to deployment. He also called for the inclusion in peacekeeping mandates of civilian protection against sexual violence, particularly in countries where such risks ran high. More broadly, there was a need to frame sexual violence initiatives in the context of efforts undertaken to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5. A lasting response was not possible if there was an inequality gap between men and women and the economic exclusion of women and girls.

CLAIRE HUTCHINSON, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Women, Peace and Security, speaking on behalf of the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#) (NATO), said the elevation of sexual violence as an international peace and security issue had led to an increased expectation that international actors would take a more prominent role in addressing it. "Without adequate responses, conflict-related sexual violence will continue to significantly jeopardize stabilization efforts as well as sustainable post-conflict reconstruction," she said, noting that the responsibility to protect and defend women from

violence could not be separated from empowerment and participation. Under the auspices of its policy and its action plan on women, peace and security, NATO addressed sexual violence through a comprehensive approach that was part of a wider framework. Noting that the development of relevant military guidelines had provided a base from which to work, while also serving as a practical tool, she said NATO had established a civil society advisory panel to better understand the views of women in crisis areas. NATO forces had also worked with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Special Envoy Angelina Jolie to advance and mainstream the issue and had made gender equality a central tenant in all its work.

CHARLES T. NTWAAGAE ([Botswana](#)) said efforts to address sexual violence in conflict situations should be consistent with and complementary to the Organization's wider efforts. In that regard, he underscored the need for greater coordination and collaboration, welcoming the Secretary-General's 2017 launch of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes, known as the Fez Plan of Action. Religious leaders could play a key role in influencing their followers and use their moral authority to support specific strategies to prevent incitement to violence. He also called on States to take practical steps to address obstacles standing in the way of women's access to justice, including by creating an enabling environment where they could easily report incidents of violence without fear or intimidation.

VLADIMIR DROBNJAK ([Croatia](#)), associating himself with the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, pointed out that sexual violence had been used as a tactic of war in the former Yugoslavia, in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Reports of mass rape and other sexually violent crimes in those locations had been among the first to come into the public eye. Some 2,500 people, mostly women but also men, were estimated to have suffered from severe forms of sexual violence during Croatia's Homeland War, he said, adding that many of those crimes remained unprosecuted and the perpetrators unpunished. Croatia had therefore adopted a Law on the Rights of Victims of Sexual Violence in the Homeland War in 2015, aimed at providing victims with support, recognition and compensation, even if the perpetrators were never found or brought to justice. "Our experience teaches us that advanced laws and international agreements in themselves are not enough if attitudes do not change," he said, urging Member States to ensure that the women, peace and security agenda was integrated into all national policies and practices.

ROLANDO CASTRO CÓRDOBA ([Costa Rica](#)), associating himself with the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, said sexual violence undermined security, exacerbated conflicts and damaged a country's civil and political life. Countries bore the primary responsibility to protect their most vulnerable, including women, ethnic minorities, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and others. Noting that crimes related to sexual violence, extortion, rape, abuse and human smuggling were highly relevant against the backdrop of today's massive migratory flows, he called for a zero-tolerance policy for those who committed or condoned sexual violence in situations of conflict. Justice and legal assistance must be provided for victims, including referrals to the International Criminal Court, where appropriate. Welcoming the establishment of the voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and the appointment of a new victims' defender position within the United Nations, he said sexual violence should become a designation criterion for sanctions regimes and that Member States should provide reparations and support and reintegration services to help victims to deal with the effects and stigma of such crimes.

JIRI ELLINGER ([Czech Republic](#)), aligning himself with the European Union, called for increased efforts to put an end to impunity. Initiatives at the highest political levels must be translated into concrete actions to ensure that there was accountability. By implementing projects aimed at women's participation and their economic empowerment, his country was seeking to address some of the root causes of societal inequalities, including in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Georgia and Zambia. Equal participation of women and men in law enforcement agencies created a more conducive environment to reporting those serious crimes. In terms of enforcement, the Czech Republic continued to support the International Criminal Court and ad hoc international tribunals, as well as UN-Women and its global activities.

IVANA PAJEVIĆ ([Montenegro](#)), associating herself with the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, said in an increasingly divided world, torn by conflicts and political breakdown, women and girls were at heightened risk of all forms of gender-based violence, including rape, assault, domestic violence, early marriage and exploitation by smugglers. Urging Member States to fully realize their commitments to protecting women and girls from those crimes, she drew particular attention to empowerment, conflict prevention, reconciliation and efforts to reduce inequalities. In 2017, Montenegro had contributed to the NATO trust fund for Jordan with a view to empower women soldiers, recruit more female personnel and provide gender training. Expressing support for the role of international peace operations as instruments to ensure respect for human rights and to build sustainable institutions in conflict areas, she said Montenegro provided all its soldiers involved in peacekeeping with regular trainings on the prevention of sexual violence in conflicts. The Council should explicitly include those crimes as a designation criterion in its sanctions regimes.

AMJAD QASSEM AGHA ([Syria](#)) said his Government had coordinated with the Special Representative so that she could carry out her mission, but also to refute any false allegations. Some countries had made allegations against Syria based on purely political reasons. Highlighting several measures that had been taken to enhance the response to such violent crimes and provide care to victims, he rejected the allegations made in the Secretary-General's report that his Government practiced

sexual violence. Those were fabricated reports that relied on information gathered by terrorist groups, including the White Helmets. In that regard, the Special Representative should have carried out her own investigation in coordination with the Syrian Government, he said, noting that she had gone beyond her mandate. Moreover, the plight of Syrian refugee women abroad had not been addressed in the report, including the rape and trafficking of those women in Turkish camps and forced marriages in Jordanian camps. The report also ignored the suffering of Syrian women in the occupied Golan Heights. For its part, Syria was committed to international efforts to end all forms of sexual violence and punish the perpetrators. To that end, it would continue to cooperate with the Special Representative.

JAMAL FARES ALROWAIEI ([Bahrain](#)) said sexual violence in conflict was a major factor in displacement as well as with current waves of global migration. To address those issues, he called on the international community to counter the stigmatization of victims and step up efforts in such areas as early warning mechanisms, prevention and rapid reaction. Despite being a peaceful country, Bahrain had taken steps, including by establishing the High Council of Women to support them and protect their rights. It had also signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other relevant agreements, and had enshrined national laws to protect their rights and combat domestic violence. Bahraini women also played a major part in the country's political life.

MAJDA MOUTCHOU ([Morocco](#)), voicing regret that sexual violence in conflict had become systematic and widespread, condemned such crimes, which ate away at communities, terrorized societies and killed any efforts at peace and reconciliation. "Indignation is not enough," she stressed, calling on Member States to put in place efforts to help victims to rebuild their lives. Also needed were efforts to prevent conflicts, eradicate gender-based discrimination, promote peacebuilding and facilitate women's participation in the settlement of disputes, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Religious leaders should be encouraged to speak out firmly and quickly against violence, she said, adding that working closely with local communities was critical as they could lead early warning alert systems and reaction plans. As a member of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, Morocco supported prevention efforts and the fight against impunity. "It is up to us to guarantee that the perpetrators of these acts are held accountable" and that human dignity was ensured for all people as laid out in the 2030 Agenda, she said.

ISSA KONFOUROU ([Mali](#)), speaking on behalf of the Human Security Network, commended the Secretary-General's report, noting with concern the ongoing use of sexual violence as a strategy of war, in particular in the targeting of people based on ethnic and political affiliations. Sexual violence exacerbated insecurities in affected regions, which often reverberated over several generations. Victims were generally punished or stigmatized, while perpetrators often went free. Calling on the Council to redouble its efforts to fight impunity, he recognized the role of the International Criminal Court in situations of conflict. Nevertheless, while the Rome Statute recognized sexual violence as a war crime and a crime against humanity, the main responsibility for prosecuting such crimes must be shouldered by States. Capacity-building for women and their increased participation in decision-making bodies was also key to prevention, he said, underscoring the positive benefits resulting from their full enjoyment of the human rights. He also emphasized the importance of providing rehabilitation services to victims through the provision of medical and psychological care.

ALI NASEER MOHAMED ([Maldives](#)) condemned the weaponization of sexual violence through the targeting of victims based on ethnic, religious or political affiliation. The failure to address such issues had led to further harm, including child marriage and commercial sexual exploitation. While progress on that issue had been made in a number of countries, the majority of cases remained unreported due to the social stigma attached to victims, fear of reprisals or systematic barriers and obstacles that survivors had to overcome. In that vein, he called for increased awareness about such crimes, changes in social taboos and a reliable framework to identify sexual exploitation. Advocating for greater access to justice, he noted that many victims were from marginalized rural communities that had not always benefited from full legal protections. Consequently, the rule of law must be extended to all communities, and national laws on sexual violence and abuse must be aligned with international human rights standards.

ALEJANDRO GUILLERMO VERDIER ([Argentina](#)), associating himself with the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, expressed support for the Secretary-General's recommendations related to the prevention of, and combating impunity for, sexual violence in conflict situations. The growing threat posed by those crimes — committed by both State and non-State groups — must be punished to the fullest extent of the law, including through the Council's sanctions regimes. One key prevention tool was to deal with risk factors and the underlying conditions that put women at greater risk, including discrimination and climates conducive to impunity. Efforts to improve States' capacities to document and research those crimes, as well as the provision of legal assistance, were also critical, he said, underscoring the need to place victims at the centre of that work. Urging the Council to keep those issues in mind in its peacebuilding and peacekeeping work, he said sexual violence should also be addressed as specific commitments in peace agreements. Argentina had joined the network of national focal points on women, peace and security as well as the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, he said, calling on all Member States to build more peaceful societies based on fairness, gender equality and the full elimination of violence against women.

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