

Statement by Ambassador Raimonda Murmokaitė,
Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations
at the UN Security Council open debate on women and peace and security

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The progress achieved in addressing the issue of sexual violence in conflict since ICTY and ICTR placed sexual aggression on the agenda of post-conflict justice is undeniable. Relevant UNSC resolutions have created an extensive tool-kit for tackling conflict-related sexual violence.

A horrendous assault on individual bodies and human dignity, sexual violence in conflict goes far beyond common banditry and has been repeatedly used for imposing wider political agendas, destroying opponents, ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, or clearing access to resources and territories.

My delegation therefore congratulates the Rwandan presidency of the Security Council for holding this critical debate. We welcome the recommendations by the Secretary General contained in his latest report. We also commend the work and personal dedication of the Special Representative on sexual violence in conflict, Zainab Bangura.

Speaking at a Missing Peace Symposium earlier this year, Madame Bangura insisted that sexual violence as a tactic of war “is as effective as any bomb and as destructive as any mine, and it needs to be addressed with the same determination as any other deadly weapon used in war.”

Indeed, we cannot stem conflict-related sexual aggression unless we are determined to prevent, protect, and prosecute. For as long as the perpetrators know they can get away with it, this barbaric tactic of warfare will continue.

While associating with the statement made by a representative of the European Union, I will limit myself to the following points.

When it comes to conflict-related sexual crimes, my delegation urges the Security Council to use the full range of means at its disposal to tackle impunity, including systematic referrals to the International Criminal Court, mandating commissions of inquiry as well as explicit and vocal condemnation of such crimes.

Lithuania supports full implementation of the provisions of UNSC Resolution 1960 on rape and other forms of sexual violence as designation criteria when adopting or renewing targeted sanctions in situations of armed conflict. We expect such criteria to be consistently applied in sanctioning entities and individuals identified in the Secretary General's reports as well as those named by the Special Representative.

My delegations would welcome enhanced interaction between the Special Representative on sexual violence in conflict and relevant Security Council sanctions committees and expert groups as well as between the Special Representative and the Council as a whole. Furthermore, we would welcome the inclusion of provisions on conflict-related sexual violence in all the mandates of UN peacekeeping and special political missions.

Tackling impunity is hard to imagine without a robust monitoring and reporting system. This may be easier said than done, however, especially where technical capacities are inadequate or where a critical lack of confidence in transitional justice create serious impediments.

If the perpetrators of sexual violence are free to return and establish themselves among those they have abused, victims will continue to live in fear, and countless abuses will remain unreported, reinforcing a sense of impunity.

Developing requisite capabilities and restoring the victims' trust in justice are essential for the purpose of prevention and deterrence. Providing better support for victims, including by establishing reparation mechanisms, and women's systematic inclusion in all aspect of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconciliation and transitional justice are key to restoring the victims' trust and making sure that crimes will not go unpunished.

The Council and individual member states have an important role to play on these matters. My delegation welcomes the recent declaration by G8, including provisions on improved investigation and documentation of sexual violence in conflict.

The Council in particular should see to it that relevant security sector reforms and DDR processes are fully responsive to the sensitivities arising from conflict-related sexual violence, and are based on rigorous vetting and training of national security institutions. We welcome the Secretary General's recommendation that blanket amnesties should not be applied where conflict related sexual violence is in question.

Before concluding, a few words on zero-tolerance. My delegation is convinced that provisions on zero-tolerance policy vis-à-vis sexual misconduct by UN personnel should be included in all the mandates for UN peacekeeping operations and peace-building missions. For the time being, that is not the case, and we hope that the gap will be redressed as mandates are being renewed.

At the same time, we as the international community should be using all means and opportunities available for stamping out sexual violence as a tool of war. The combined power of women's full participation; consistent support for and protection of victims, human rights defenders, activists, and journalists who expose the crimes; education and global awareness raising campaigns; personal engagement of world and regional leaders, spiritual authorities and community elders are essential in fostering a global zero-tolerance environment for these heinous crimes. We expect no less from the Council as the most authoritative body on peace and security matters than taking the lead in raising the stakes for all perpetrators of conflict-related sexual crimes and would-be abusers to a prohibitive level.