



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9378**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Friday, 14 July 2023, 10.30 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Lord Ahmad/Mr. Kariuki . . . . .	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. França Danese
	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France . . . . .	Mrs. Dime Labille
	Gabon . . . . .	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ishikane
	Malta . . . . .	Mr. Kuymizakis
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia/Ms. Zabolotskaya
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Geissbühler
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

### Women and peace and security

Conflict-related sexual violence: promoting implementation of Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence

Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2023/413)

Letter dated 26 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2023/476)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.*

### Adoption of the agenda

*The agenda was adopted.*

### Women and peace and security

#### **Conflict-related sexual violence: promoting implementation of Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2023/413)**

#### **Letter dated 26 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2023/476)**

**The President:** I would like to begin by warmly welcoming the ministers and other high-level representatives. Their presence at this meeting today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion before the Council.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Ukraine, Uruguay and Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefer to participate in this meeting: Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor.

**Ms. Zabolotskaya** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to raise a point of order regarding the participation in this meeting of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

As we all remember, Ms. Patten said that Russian soldiers had been — allegedly — given Viagra to rape Ukrainian women. Then a recording of her conversation with people she thought to be representatives of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine was leaked online. In that conversation, she admitted to having no reliable information on that matter.

Therefore, Ms. Patten abused her status as Special Representative of the Secretary-General, spreading false information with regard to a United Nations Member State. We would like to put on record that we oppose her participation in this meeting.

**The President:** I take note of the point of order raised by the representative of the Russian Federation.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Naw Hser Hser, civil society representative; and Nadine, survivor champion.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Silvio Gonzato, Deputy Head of the European Union delegation to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/476, which contains the text of a letter dated 26 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to Ms. Patten.

**Ms. Patten:** I wish to express sincere appreciation for the leadership of the United Kingdom in convening this open debate on promoting the implementation of Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence.

I warmly welcome the civil society briefers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. As ever, the lived experience of survivors such as Nadine and advocates such as Naw Hser Hser must shape global solutions. Survivors are the moral compass of this mandate.

I just want to flag that to highlight survivors' voices the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network, which I chair and which comprises 24 United Nations entities, has organized an exhibition titled: A Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Survivor's Journey. I really welcome all at this meeting today to visit the exhibition in the Visitors' Lobby during the course of the day.

We meet today as the trend lines for conflict-related sexual violence are worsening. The world is facing the highest number of conflicts since the Second World War, while the number of people forced to flee their homes has reached a first-ever record of 110 million. Rising militarization and arms proliferation are bringing conflicts across the globe to boiling point, creating the conditions for unimaginable and unrelenting cruelty. Gang rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence are being used as tactics of war, torture and terrorism to subjugate and displace populations. At a time of unprecedented global turbulence, new threats have emerged from the largely ungoverned digital space. Climate-related insecurity and displacement have exacerbated competition for scarce resources, in turn increasing intercommunal violence, including sexual violence. Every new wave of warfare brings a rising tide of human tragedy, including new waves of war's oldest, most-silenced and least-condemned crime. And yet the promise expressed by the Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security that focus on conflict-related sexual violence is prevention. They represent a commitment to bringing all the available tools to bear to break the seemingly endless cycles of sexual violence, impunity and revenge. Even as the Council is meeting to take up the issue once again, violations continue to shatter lives and livelihoods, destabilize communities and displace hundreds of thousands around the world. The singular focus of the Council must be to bridge the gap between resolutions and realities and between our highest aspirations and operations on the ground.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/413) before us today provides a global snapshot of the patterns and trends of conflict-related sexual violence across 20 situations of concern. It records 2,455 United Nations-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence committed in the course of 2022. Women and girls account for 94 per cent of the verified cases, with 6 per cent of the reported violations being against men and boys. Children represent 32 per cent of the verified

incidents, with girls making up 97 per cent of those — a vast majority of the cases. Yet while the report conveys the severity and brutality of verified incidents, it does not purport to reflect the global scale or prevalence of a chronically underreported and historically hidden crime. We know that for every woman who comes forward, many more are silenced by social pressures, stigma, insecurity and a paucity of services.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is once again the country presenting the highest number of cases, with 701 violations of conflict-related sexual violence verified through the rigorous methodology under the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1960 (2010). In addition, United Nations humanitarian service providers reported more than 38,000 cases of sexual and gender-based violence in 2022 in North Kivu alone, including alarming levels of sexual exploitation of children at more than 1,000 sites in and around displacement camps. Against that backdrop, I felt compelled to visit the Democratic Republic of the Congo in June to assess the situation first-hand. I was horrified by the testimonies I heard from women and girls, many of whom had been very recently raped or gang-raped and were still receiving treatment. Some were completely disoriented and in a near-catatonic state owing to the severity of the trauma. Many of them stressed the daily risk of sexual violence while they were carrying out livelihood activities around the camps, such as searching for food and collecting wood or water.

Just imagine facing a reality every day that you are likely to be raped, yet having no choice but to take that risk because your family must survive. Those women and girls face an unacceptable choice between economic subsistence and sexual violence and between their livelihoods and their lives. We therefore cannot underestimate how food insecurity increases the risk of exposure to sexual violence and how the nexus of conflict and hunger is linked to the complex spirals of cause and effect. Another very disturbing reality is the proliferation of brothels or so-called *maisons de tolérance* inside and around the camps for internally displaced persons, operating in broad daylight and under the very noses of national authorities and humanitarian actors. Sexual exploitation, including forced prostitution as a basic means of survival — sometimes referred to as “survival sex” — is rampant. It is sexual violence driven by economic desperation, with women and girls

compelled to prostitute themselves for less than a dollar in order to survive another day. It is inconceivable that rather than zero tolerance for sexual violence, we are seeing houses of tolerance.

My first field visit in 2022 was to Ukraine, following the surfacing of reports of sexual violence after the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion. I was struck not only by the cases of sexual violence in conflict zones, but also by the acute vulnerability of millions of women and children forced to flee the country in a matter of weeks or months after the start of the conflict. When I visited reception centres in Poland and Moldova, I witnessed first-hand the extraordinary toll on women, children and the elderly, including their vulnerability to unscrupulous individuals and criminal networks, for whom the rapid and unprecedented mass displacement of people is not a tragedy but an opportunity for trafficking and sexual exploitation. In March, when I returned to Ukraine, I once again met with survivors and heard their heart-wrenching accounts of brutal sexual violence reportedly perpetrated by Russian soldiers. I want to take this opportunity to reiterate the Secretary-General's call on the Russian authorities to take prevention measures in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions. At the same time, I am encouraged by the commitments made by the Ukrainian Government, which were articulated in the framework of cooperation that I signed with Deputy Prime Minister Olga Stefanishyna in May 2022. Since then, my Office and the United Nations system have been supporting the national authorities in implementing a comprehensive plan of action that includes addressing the cross-border dimensions of trafficking.

Animating the trend lines in the report before the Council are the harrowing personal experiences that speak to the devastating human cost of sexual violence. In Haiti, after witnessing the execution of their husbands, victims have been raped by gang members in front of their children. Many have been forced out of vehicles at gunpoint, robbed and subjected to collective rape in broad daylight. In the Central African Republic, a woman was gang-raped to death by members of an armed group who accused her of having a relationship with a member of the national armed forces. In Ethiopia, many survivors have contracted HIV as a result of rape and now face a lifetime of stigma and health challenges. In Iraq, among the female Yazidi survivors who returned from Da'esh captivity, more than 430 remain at displacement sites, grappling with significant

mental-health and socioeconomic challenges. Children born of rape are still unable to obtain birth registration and identity documents, because Iraqi law requires proof of paternity.

The annual report clearly demonstrates the emboldening effects of impunity. The reality is that until we effectively raise the cost and consequences of committing, commanding and condoning sexual violence, we will never stem the tide of such violations. This year, 49 parties, most of them non-State actors, are listed for systematically committing sexual violence. More than 70 per cent of them are persistent perpetrators who have appeared on the list for five or more years without any remedial or corrective action being taken. It will be critical to ensure greater coherence between the Secretary-General's listing and the targeted and graduated measures being imposed by United Nations Sanctions Committees. If applied in a timely and consistent manner, sanctions can change the calculus of parties operating on the assumption that rape is cost-free — or even profitable — in the political economy of war, in which women are trafficked, traded and sold.

The report also identifies several emerging issues that have exacerbated long-standing challenges to reporting and response. For instance, inflammatory rhetoric against United Nations peacekeepers, including violent demonstrations, narrows the operating space for delivering services and verifying allegations. Nonetheless, nearly 70 per cent of United Nations-verified cases were reported in the eight peacekeeping and special political missions where women's protection advisers were deployed. While data is not a prerequisite for response, the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements convened by women's protection advisers are essential to building the evidence base for scaling up interventions.

Globally, women human rights defenders, including those advocating on behalf of victims of sexual violence, have been targeted with attacks aimed at preventing their activism. Patterns of sexual violence have continued to be used as part of the repertoire of political violence to intimidate and punish opponents and women human rights defenders. In Myanmar, Colombia and Libya, women, girls, men, boys and individuals of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity have been subjected to sexual violence, including in detention settings.

The report highlights trends in the wake of unconstitutional shifts in power, escalating militarization and the proliferation of illicit arms. It looks at the complex array of battlefield actors, such as private military and security companies, that have complicated attribution and accountability. It also highlights political and security challenges that have eroded rule-of-law institutions, creating a risk of a rule of lawlessness. Indeed, the central insight of this year's report is the need to harness the preventive power of the rule of law. The positive impact of our sustained engagement is evident in a number of countries. In September 2022 in Guinea, I attended the historic opening of the trial related to the events of 28 September 2009. That historic moment for survivors of sexual violence was the culmination of a decade of unrelenting advocacy and technical support to national judicial authorities by my Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, consistent efforts by the military justice authorities, in particular, have helped to stem the tide of mass rape, although sexual violence, especially by the plethora of armed groups, persists unabated. Several emblematic cases involving notorious warlords and military officers have been prosecuted and the perpetrators convicted. On the legislative front, the Parliament adopted a law on protection and reparations for victims of conflict-related sexual violence and established a national reparations fund. The personal commitment and leadership of the First Lady of the Democratic Republic of the Congo was instrumental in those gains. In terms of transitional justice, some momentum was also observed in the Central African Republic, with the delivery by the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic of its first verdict convicting a commander of an armed group for rape perpetrated by his subordinates. In Colombia, the landmark report of the Truth Commission made specific recommendations to State institutions for transformative reparations for survivors. When I visited Colombia in May, I heard from survivors how important such acknowledgement and the guarantees of non-repetition are for their healing and recovery.

In terms of a way forward, the report recommends instituting gender-responsive justice and security-sector reform, strengthening holistic and multi-sectoral services for survivors, curtailing the flow of small arms and light weapons and engaging politically and

diplomatically to address sexual violence in ceasefire and peace agreements. The report also recommends providing predictable financial support to the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Prevention Multi-Partner Trust Fund for the work of the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network and the Team of Experts. Women's protection advisers are also a linchpin of our institutional response architecture, and their deployment and the reinforcement of teams should be considered at critical inflection points, including during mission transitions and drawdowns.

We must focus our political resolve and resources in a global context of unremitting violence. Indeed, since the report before the Council was issued, serious allegations of conflict-related sexual violence have come to light. In the Sudan, since conflict broke out in April, the country office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has received credible reports of violations against more than 50 women and girls. As many as 20 women were reportedly raped in a single attack. I received additional information this week on the targeting of medical infrastructure and staff providing support to victims of sexual violence, as well as an increase in abductions of women and girls. Both the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces are listed by the Secretary-General, and I have communicated to General Mohammed Hamdan Hemedti and General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan the measures that they are respectively required to take by the Council.

It is evident that those tragic episodes form part of the long litany of battles fought on the bodies of women and girls, from Bosnia to Rwanda, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere. Today we know more than ever before about what motivates sexual violence, who the perpetrators are and the service response that survivors need. We know that those crimes do not occur in a vacuum but are tied to broader security dynamics. It is therefore essential to ground prevention efforts in that enhanced knowledge, which is at the heart of the prevention strategy that my Office launched in September 2022.

We must ensure the implementation of Council resolutions while adapting our actions to today's conflicts and emerging global challenges, including threats from the largely ungoverned digital space and climate-related insecurity. The time is now for us to double down on the institutional and accountability frameworks put in place by successive resolutions. We must act urgently and with sustained resolve to save succeeding generations from that scourge.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Patten for her thorough briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Naw Hser Hser.

**Ms. Naw Hser Hser:** I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Council today in its open debate on conflict-related sexual violence. I am Naw Hser Hser, an advisory board member of the Women's League of Burma, a civil-society coalition representing women from across Myanmar. It has now been more than two years since the military launched a coup overthrowing the elected Government, which has resulted in further conflict across Myanmar. More than 23,000 civilians have been arrested by the junta and more than 1.8 million have been displaced, and women and girls are at greater risk of sexual and gender-based violence, largely at the hands of the military but from anti-military defence forces as well.

Despite those risks, women remain at the forefront of the resistance to the military and make up more than 60 percent of pro-democracy human rights defenders. Women human rights defenders from across Myanmar are on the front lines, providing essential services to internally displaced persons and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, reporting on human rights abuses and providing shelter and safe houses for protesters. We are united in our collective call for a federal democracy in Myanmar, and we know that in order to achieve that, we must not only end military rule but also challenge patriarchal oppression,

Women human rights defenders in Myanmar face enormous challenges, including threats to their safety and that of their families. For example, the military has issued arrest warrants for many of our staff. That undermines our ability to support IDPs and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Many women defenders are in hiding, or like me have been forced to leave Myanmar in order to continue their work.

The military has long used sexual violence to attack civilian populations. Rape and sexual violence were hallmarks of the military's 2017 genocide of the Rohingya, and Rohingya women and girls, including transgender women, who fled Myanmar for Bangladesh now face higher risks of violence. Since the coup d'état, we have documented more than 100 cases of conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence. In one case, junta soldiers repeatedly raped a woman at gunpoint in front of her husband in Chin state. That same evening, the victim's sister-in-law, who was seven

months pregnant, was also raped by junta soldiers. The real number of cases is likely much higher, since many victims do not report sexual violence for fear of further abuse by the military. Women and LGBTQI people in detention are vulnerable to torture, including sexual violence. Thousands of women have been arrested since the coup and remain in detention, and 15 have been sentenced to death for their pro-democracy activities. Sexual violence is a deliberate and systematic tactic for targeting and punishing women, not only for speaking out against the regime but also for defying patriarchal norms.

Many women defenders face both online abuse and tactics that can result in offline violence, false allegations and unlawful arrests. Women from ethnic or religious minorities, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and women who are politically active have been targeted for such abuse. As a result of such attacks, many women feel they have no choice but to censor themselves or scale back their activism. International actors should support women human rights defenders, protect their fundamental rights and enable their participation, including at the international level.

Accountability is essential to ending all forms of violence against women in all their diversity. The 2021 coup was a result of decades of impunity for the military junta, including for its use of sexual and gender-based violence as a tactic to target and terrorize civilian populations. At the moment, domestic options for justice, including for conflict-related sexual violence, are impossible. I therefore urge the Security Council to refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court for war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

As the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar recently noted, the military needs three things to sustain itself — arms, money and international legitimacy. Women members of civil society know all too well that those are also the tools used to perpetrate violence against women in the country. The Security Council should impose an embargo on the sale and transfer of arms, ammunition and aviation fuel. I also urge the international community to enact targeted sanctions against the military and its proxies, including Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise. In addition, I urge the Council to reject any efforts by the military junta to hold sham elections, which cannot be free or fair or lay the groundwork for a democratic future. Finally, I ask the Council to build on the progress of resolution 2669

(2022) by continuing to demand an immediate end to all forms of violence in Myanmar, including sexual and gender-based violence, and by keeping Myanmar on the agenda of the Security Council through open meetings, so that civil society can participate.

Currently, one in three people in Myanmar are in need of humanitarian assistance due to food insecurity and limited access to health care, including sexual and reproductive care for survivors. Local ethnic women's organizations are vital to providing humanitarian assistance to their communities, and they need the Council's support to continue that essential work.

This is an important moment for Myanmar. For the first time, we the people of Myanmar are united across ethnic, religious and gender lines in our common struggle to end the military dictatorship, ensure justice and call for a federal democratic Myanmar, grounded in diversity and pluralism. Now we need the Council's support.

I would like to end my statement today with one simple point. Myanmar is an example of how political violence, including sexual violence, is used to intimidate, punish and silence human rights defenders, journalists and women leaders in many conflicts, such as in the Sudan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Libya. I urge the Council today to demand an end to all forms of violence against women human rights defenders and civil-society leaders and to take meaningful action to demonstrate that the protection of women's human rights is fundamental to peace, not only in Myanmar but in all conflicts and crises.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Hser Hser for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Nadine.

**Nadine:** It is a great honour to be here. As a survivor champion for the Government of the United Kingdom, I will be speaking in a collective voice, highlighting the views of many survivors from various countries. I also want to take the opportunity to thank everyone here for understanding the need for and importance of a survivor-centred approach to guiding the way we respond to conflict-related sexual violence.

Sexual violence is a crime against humanity. It is brutal, deliberate and intended to punish and humiliate individuals and their communities. Many of its victims suffer from physical and psychological trauma, long-term injuries and HIV infections, and some have

died as a result. As a result of conflict-related sexual violence, some women have to deal with unwanted pregnancies, becoming mothers who bear the burden of being excluded by their own families and communities. Men and boys are facing reporting barriers because of the stigma of perceived emasculation, as well physical and psychological consequences, and often there are no legal provisions regulating the rape of men.

The impact of sexual violence is pervasive and destructive. The sheer numbers of people affected by sexual violence show simply how many families and how many communities are affected or destroyed. In South Sudan, women and their families in the Yida camp, who were already displaced when we spoke to them in 2019, were already telling us how difficult it was to try to find work and get food, because getting out of the camp was too dangerous. They were watching their children die of starvation because leaving the camp was not an option.

Many survivors are very grateful for the global conversation and attention on the issue and for the efforts to reinforce legal frameworks and mechanisms to prevent and respond. However, we are facing the challenges of translating collective efforts from a global to a national level, so that the people directly affected can have a better life. Many survivors want to see their States take tangible steps that will increase compliance with international legal frameworks and translate their obligations into national legislation. That said, if States are to strengthen the rule of law to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence, we believe that they first need to come up with clear action plans, effective actions and a commitment to upholding their obligation to their citizens by preventing, stopping and responding appropriately to conflict-related sexual violence. People need to see States taking charge of prevention and response in order to feel safe and to be able to enjoy their basic human rights.

Although not all perpetrators are men in uniform, States should work very hard to restore good standards for their servicemen. That is because most of us want to see them doing what they are intended to do, namely, protect the people — all of us. Citizens should not be afraid when they meet men in uniform.

The repetition of sexual violence keeps people living in fear and vulnerable to further attacks. When people live in a country where there is no rule of law and where those perpetrating the crime get away with

impunity, they worry. They do not know when they may have an encounter with groups that perpetuate such crimes. They cannot feel safe.

Many survivors have asked me to tell the Council that States need to have organized national conversations about the roles of people in uniform and to hold to account perpetrators from other groups, too. The uniform does not give people licence to commit crimes. It should be worn by servicepeople who understand their duties to represent the State and protect its people. States must reinforce their recruitment processes and take due diligence measures before allowing people to join uniformed forces. Those who work in the forces must first receive mandatory training on how to protect and engage with survivors and how to enforce and comply with national and international laws.

States must have courage when holding national conversations about their laws and cultural norms and customs, because we cannot undermine basic human rights in the name of religion or culture. It is the role of the State to ensure that national laws address issues objectively, putting cultural views aside.

Currently, many civil society- and survivor-led organizations have been at the forefront of leading on raising awareness about sexual violence, but we need States to support and promote awareness about such work. States should be more present, not absent. They should be at the forefront when it comes to the responsibility to raise awareness about conflict-related sexual violence.

States should support and see the benefit of inclusive processes, bringing everyone on board in the understanding that tackling the issue of conflict-related sexual violence is a national concern and the biggest attack on humankind. States should promote laws that condemn stigma in all its forms and treat survivors with dignity and care. Once that has become a national conversation, we ask that States work with international partners to identify how international frameworks can complement national efforts.

States should also break all the myths and surrounding rhetoric, such as why servicemen or servicewomen perpetuate conflict-related sexual violence. Some of those include being under the influence of drugs, being away from their wives for a long time or complying with peer pressure during war. Some even claim that sometimes people are not in control of what happened. The most ridiculous

myth is to blame victims for contributing to the attack because of the way they were dressed and all kinds of similar reasons.

We want to see States adopting gender-responsive approaches when engaging with survivors. It is vital to treat people with dignity and be sensitive to their gender and their sexuality. We ask that first responders understand survivor vulnerability and not undermine the impact of sexual violence on survivors because they are older or because of their sexual orientation.

A survivor who identified as part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community once told us, to contradict a myth and misconception he faced repeatedly, that just because he was a gay man, it did not mean that he enjoyed the act. State actors must approach all survivors with the same compassion and care, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation. States should not allow any excuse for someone to violate another person's private space and force them into degrading treatment.

States need to ensure that their recruitment criteria are reviewed and that the process and their armed forces are professional. Their armed forces must serve with discipline, accountability, transparency and clear expectations with regard to professionalism and the protection of all civilians. We must not allow the rhetoric that the army is for bad boys or ex-criminals or for people who have nothing else to do with their lives. If States can strengthen their criteria for who can join the forces by incorporating thorough background checks, that will at least help recruit the right people and reinstate faith in States to do the right thing for their people.

Once we have ensured that we have the right people, we need to ensure they are constantly trained and undergo refresher training so as to stay up-to-date on current norms, their roles and their duty to protect and to reinforce good practices. We ask that States incorporate a whistleblowing practice so that servicemen who witness colleagues doing the wrong thing can safely report colleagues who misbehave.

Over 90–95 per cent of survivors never report what happened to them to the police. There are many reasons for that, including a lack of faith or trust in the justice system and how it will treat them. Conviction rates for those crimes that are reported are shockingly low. That also causes survivors not to report — why report when so few cases succeed? We should understand

that that fact alone can hinder the delivery of, and access to, justice for many survivors who do not come forward. In all of our justice systems, there is much room for improvement and a need to draw on lessons learned regarding how to effectively deliver justice in a survivor-centred way.

We should learn from jurisdictions that are trying to carry out safe and effective work on accountability. I was in Colombia three weeks ago and was very inspired to see the country having a national conversation and addressing the challenges with survivors. The opening of micro-cases and the announcement of a special jurisdiction are examples of State efforts to respond and prevent. However, many survivors were still very reluctant to come forward, mainly due to safety fears. Therefore, we should also recognize that some States need help to hold perpetrators accountable. The international community can intervene earlier by working with States that are making an effort but are still struggling.

We can support countries in training staff, ensuring that people understand the international frameworks and upgrading national laws to meet international standards. We can help them to tackle the obstacles to justice and share lessons learned from other courts and countries. The international community should support States that are dealing with aggressors and perpetrators that are more powerful and put a stop to double standards, quickly condemning some perpetrators while turning a blind eye to others. All survivors of conflict-related sexual violence suffer greatly. We should not respond quickly to some only because of their geographical positioning, while others die slowly and unnoticed.

The international community must condemn all perpetrators and impose sanctions against all of them. Just to give an example, the response in Ukraine was very good, but there are also many survivors in many other countries, such as Iran, the Sudan, Guatemala and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, inter alia. The international community can help to create or support additional avenues for accountability for international crimes, such as expanding the International Criminal Court's jurisdiction, creating tribunals or adjudication mechanisms to fill gaps and facilitating the use of universal jurisdiction in other countries. The international response must be consistent. There cannot be avenues for accountability for international crimes in some States and a total absence of response and accountability in others.

However, we must also engage with survivors in efforts to close the gap between normative frameworks and the reality on the ground. Survivor participation is key to efforts to raise awareness about conflict-related sexual violence and its impact and about how we can strengthen justice pathways in a way that keeps survivors at their centre. When we became survivor champions, Kolbassia and I knew and understood that our role was not just about the two of us representing all survivors but also about figuring out how to make a space and create a platform through which more survivors could participate in the work of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative. I am grateful that the United Kingdom Government understands that and has been very supportive. We were honoured to work with so many other survivors from many countries in the planning of the conference in London. During a survivors' retreat at Wilton Park this year, we sought to establish together what proper engagement means. I am very grateful that we now have a global survivor advisory group that is committed to guiding how we prevent and respond and to promoting a survivor-centred approach in the area of conflict-related sexual violence.

I hope that at the next meeting on this issue another survivor from the group will be invited to speak to the Council — and we are asking more countries to follow suit in order to promote the leadership of champions and survivors. We can learn good practices from other countries such as Kosovo and Colombia in the way they engage with survivors. Kolbassia and I have had the opportunity to meet many more survivors from various countries, and we have been very inspired by seeing their determination and resilience. They tell us about their own challenges in surviving journeys and the risks they take in doing what they do. Despite the challenges, the survivors who are leading the work on the ground are facing a lot of problems in terms of their own safety, stigma and in their efforts to bring their own communities to understand the value of their work. They are doing a great deal with little support from States or the international community, but as a result of that lack of funding many of them experience serious financial difficulties. They cannot compete with big names that easily meet the criteria for funding. They are nevertheless doing tremendous work, including inspiring other survivors about resilience and hope for the future. I would like to take this opportunity to ask for the establishment of a fund to specifically support survivor-led work.

Before I conclude, I also want to take this opportunity to say that although I now live in the United Kingdom and have been able to rebuild my life, what is happening in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — the country I am from originally — is very sad. I call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be more present, not absent, with regard to what is going on in our country. It has a responsibility to start that national conversation and to raise awareness locally about what is going on. I ask the Government to support survivors and condemn stigma in all its forms. Our people are suffering too much, and the war has been long. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has become a dangerous place to live for women, let alone for little girls. The aggressors are getting away with what they are doing, and they seem to have strong allies and international support. I want to take this opportunity to ask the international community to condemn them, hold them accountable and to end the double standards by responding quickly and effectively to what is happening in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**The President:** I thank Nadine for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Pramila Patten for her ongoing work in this area. She has led this agenda with conviction, courage and principle. I have had the honour to work with her directly, and we continue to recognize the important work of the United Nations in that regard.

I also thank our incredible briefers, Ms. Naw Hser Hser and Ms. Nadine, for their briefings today. To put it into context, when we hear from survivors at the Security Council — and I want everyone to think about this very carefully — they have been through the most abhorrent violation of their person, unimaginable in every sense. Not only have they survived that particular violation of their person — their private space, as Ms. Nadine rightly said — they have survived. They are not just victims but survivors in the truest sense. And when we hear from survivors, whether in the Council or anywhere else in the world, we must imagine the strength, courage and conviction of those survivors. Not only have they survived, they have become the most powerful of advocates for this vital agenda before us today. I therefore reiterate my gratitude, through Ms. Nadine and Ms. Hser Hser, to all the courageous

survivors who are doing incredible work around the world. I thank them for doing so much to bring global attention to the horrors of conflict-related sexual violence and to the central and pivotal responsibility that we all have to support survivors.

Sexual violence must never be accepted as an inevitable consequence of war. We here in the Council have a special responsibility in that respect. As we reflect on the past 15 years, in that time the Council has built a robust framework for preventing sexual violence, supporting survivors and, importantly, bringing perpetrators to justice. And while we may note those achievements, as we have once again heard directly from the Special Representative and our expert briefers, there remains a gap all over the world between what the Council has rightly mandated and the reality faced by thousands upon thousands of people across conflict zones — boys, girls, women and men — and that violence continues. As we heard from Ms. Nadine, survivors often suffer in silence. And tragically, perpetrators go unpunished.

We need to be the Council for action, not just talk. We have a collective responsibility to bridge that gap. That means that every one of our States has to put the resolutions adopted by the Council into actual living practice, ensuring that important and pivotal access to justice, and, importantly, providing survivors with the critical services they need in order to rebuild their lives. It means that States and United Nations bodies have to incorporate that vital gender perspective into peacekeeping operations. As we have heard directly from survivors, when someone sees people in uniform, whether they are from the State or the United Nations, that should bring hope. It should address their fears. It should bring security and safety. We all therefore need to step up and do more. It means that the Security Council use sanctions against those perpetrators. And crucially, it means that those who engage in armed conflict stop acts of sexual violence with immediate effect. For its part, the United Kingdom is determined that the lack of understanding — and indeed ignorance — should never be a barrier to action.

In that regard, in order to help close the implementation gap, we have worked with the Mukwege Foundation. And I pay tribute to the incredible and courageous Dr. Denis Mukwege, whom many of us know, for launching a new guidebook on State obligations for conflict-related sexual violence. I am pleased that we have provided Council members with a copy of it. I ask

that we, as Governments, as civil society organizations, as activists and as advocates, come together to make the most of this excellent new tool. For more than a decade, supporting survivors and international cooperation have been the central tenets of the United Kingdom's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative. The prevention element is key. Our landmark international conference in November last year in London, to which Nadine referred, brought together more than 1,000 delegates. And most importantly, it brought together survivors. We have just heard from Nadine about follow-up events of the global coalition of survivors that has recently been formed. And that is needed. Why? It is because we need to accelerate progress towards our goals. Since that conference, to date, the United Kingdom Government has imposed sanctions on 13 perpetrators of sexual violence. However, as we heard from Nadine, it also requires financing. Our three-year strategy is also backed up by up to £12.5 million of funding. Importantly, it is also providing direct support for survivors and helping countries to strengthen justice and accountability.

Domestic, local justice — the evidence is there — is best served when it is done nationally. We need to stand up and ensure that we can support such efforts. We also continue to lead international efforts to support children born of conflict-related sexual violence. I ask once again the question, and it is self-reflection for all of us: what is the crime of the child born of that crime? The short answer is nothing. And we should be showing compassion, care and support to such children born of such abhorrent acts.

We published today the commitments of the United Kingdom and its partners to support that group under our Platform for action promoting the rights and well-being of children born of conflict-related sexual violence, in addition to the International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, which we recently launched and is vice-chaired by Colombia and Ukraine. I am delighted to report that it has grown to 21 members. I am truly delighted that Spain joined the Alliance in June. France also recently became a very valued and important member. All members of the Alliance are committed to amplifying survivors' voices, sharing our collective expertise and, importantly, pioneering new approaches. Members of the Alliance today — this very day of our meeting — issued a joint statement shining a light on the appalling reports of sexual violence in the Sudan, referred to by the Special Representative of

the Secretary-General in her briefing. We have called for all parties to the conflict to end violence, including sexual violence, and for safe humanitarian access to all those in need. On behalf of the United Kingdom, as the current Chair of the Alliance, I want to thank all Alliance members for standing with us on that important issue.

As we have already heard, it is survivors that are key in every sense — survivors such as those led by our survivor Champions, Nadine and Kolbassia. As the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict of the United Kingdom, I can say from personal experience that working with such groups and such incredible, courageous Champions over the past six years has been truly inspiring and humbling. They guide our entire approach, and I am truly grateful to Nadine for her contribution today.

I have had the honour of leading this agenda, as well as going on field visits, like others, throughout the world, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Balkans, Bangladesh and elsewhere. I would like to share with everyone how abhorrent those crimes are. When I visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo in November 2022, with Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Edinburgh, we went to the incredible hospital run by Dr. Mukwege — the Panzi Hospital. Forget for a moment the country. Forget who is speaking and who went on the visit. And just visualize for a moment that the youngest victim, the youngest survivor of sexual violence, whom we met, was four years old. She was a young girl who had been raped not once but a number of times. And to her, a man meant rape. That is the reality that we face around the world.

Therefore, I cannot over-emphasize the importance of our debate today. I thank my own team here in New York for putting together the agenda for this meeting. I also thank the United Kingdom's survivor advisory group, which has asked me to underline several specific key issues to the Council today, and I am honoured to do so.

First, there is the importance of a survivor-centred approach in all our work, engaging with a wide range of survivors in the decisions that we make. Why? Because it affects them.

Secondly, there is the vital role of psychosocial support for survivors overcoming trauma. All of them are broken emotionally and physically. We therefore need to ensure that the first step of helping them rebuild their lives is provided by allowing them to overcome trauma.

Lastly, the survivors' groups have asked me to underline the importance of ensuring access to justice and addressing wider sexual violence concerns during times of both war and, importantly, peace.

On the topic of justice, we are working on the elaboration of a convention on crimes against humanity so that it delivers more effectively for survivors. We are also partnering with the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to overcome barriers to justice, including through a new virtual-reality tool to help survivors engage directly with the courts. That incredible technology creates a virtual court to help witnesses and survivors give informed consent to take part in trials and help them prepare to give evidence. It is putting survivors first.

Sexual violence in conflict is not inevitable. It is reprehensible, it is abhorrent, and it is our responsibility to act. Together we can. Indeed, we must. What is more: we will, so that together we can consign sexual violence in conflict to the history books. With the help of the courageous survivors at the heart of our work — God willing, *insha'allah* — I hope that we will achieve that objective.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Geissbühler** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the United Kingdom for convening this debate and the briefers for their contributions and shocking first-hand accounts.

In the words of Nadia Murad, who briefed the Security Council in April 2022,

“We need more than moral outrage. We need action.” (S/PV.9016, p. 6)

Fifteen years after the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, as well as impunity, persists. In Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, the Sudan, South Sudan and in the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, State and non-State actors continue to use rape, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking as tactics and tools of war, torture and terrorism. We must fully and sustainably implement the tasks that the Council set itself in resolution 1820 (2008). I would like to highlight three points for action in that regard.

First, we must invest more in the deployment of expertise and capacities in United Nations missions. Women's protection advisers must be mobilized and provided with sufficient resources to enable them to fulfil their mandates. We must strengthen capacities and expertise in protecting people from sexual and gender-based violence and preventing, monitoring and prosecuting it. Those capacities must be strengthened within troop- and police-contributing countries, panels of experts on sanctions and national institutions.

Secondly, there is a close link between illicit arms proliferation and sexual violence. We must take that into account if we are to improve our prevention of those crimes. The illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons increases the risk of conflict-related sexual violence. In our prevention efforts, we need to take a systematic approach to using arms-control and disarmament tools in a gender-sensitive way, and that principle also applies to sanctions regimes. And we should promote the participation of women in forums aimed at reducing arms proliferation. For that reason, Switzerland supports the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research in its studies that relate to the issue's links to the aspect of gender.

Thirdly, all survivors should have fair and unimpeded access to justice. Victims of conflict-related sexual violence are entitled to effective remedy and reparation under international law. To that end, Switzerland supports the work of the Global Survivors Fund, which works to develop survivor-centred reparation programmes. Besides that, the documentation of crimes is crucial to their prosecution. For example, in its defence of the right to the truth, Switzerland is committed to ensuring that survivors of sexual violence in Ukraine, Kosovo, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have access to justice and reparations. If sexual violence is not prevented and people are not protected against it, there can be no equal participation. And as we well know, the full inclusion of women is a *sine qua non* for lasting peace.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would first like to welcome you to New York, Mr. President, as you preside over today's open debate, and to thank Special Representative Patten for her briefing.

Sexual violence is a heinous violation of human rights. Fifteen years after the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence in conflict, sexual

violence is still widely used as a tactic in war and terror, causing immense harm to women and girls in many countries and regions. China firmly opposes the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and strongly condemns all acts of sexual violence against women and girls. We call on the international community to work together to take comprehensive measures to eliminate sexual violence in conflict as soon as possible and to promote new progress in the area of women and peace and security.

I want to address three points.

First, we need to strengthen conflict prevention and resolution. Our world is witnessing an increasing number of violent conflicts, with nearly one fourth of the global population living in conflict-affected areas. Vulnerable groups such as women and children face particularly severe security threats and risks of sexual violence, displacement and trafficking in persons. Sexual violence in conflict cannot be eliminated in isolation. Only by establishing ceasefires, ending hostilities and restoring peace can women and children be fundamentally free from harm and their basic rights protected. To achieve peace, we must pursue the political settlement of disputes and increase our negotiation, mediation and facilitation efforts. We must practice genuine multilateralism and translate the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations into action. We should also focus on addressing root causes and invest more in achieving common security. As the Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, it must actively fulfil that role and demonstrate its commitment.

Secondly, strong countermeasures must be taken. Security Council resolutions explicitly prohibit sexual violence as a means of war, but that red line of international law has been repeatedly crossed. If we cannot effectively punish the crimes that have already been committed, it will be difficult to deter and prevent new violations. The international community must strengthen the spirit of the rule of law and implement the requirements for combating sexual violence in conflict so that perpetrators can be held accountable and justice can be achieved for their victims. The countries concerned bear the primary responsibility for the prevention and elimination of sexual violence and the protection of their own women and children. The international community, on the basis of respect for those countries' sovereignty and leadership, should

support them in increasing security sector capacity-building to combat terrorist and violent extremist forces effectively, strengthening the rule of law and improving the legal and regulatory system for the protection of their rights and interests, expanding humanitarian efforts and helping victims of sexual violence obtain remedy and reparation.

Thirdly, we must support the empowerment and development of women. In conflict situations, sexual violence is often intertwined with issues of discrimination and poverty, further worsening women's plight and suffering. In addition to a peace-focused approach, the international community should also view and address the issue from the perspective of women's empowerment and sustainable development. Efforts should be made to eliminate gender discrimination and differentiated treatment, as well as to address the livelihood challenges and development gaps that women face.

Digital and information technologies are important means for empowering women and critical tools for delivering early warnings of conflicts, victim assistance and investigation and accountability. However, the lack of reliable, accessible and affordable digital infrastructure is a common challenge for women in conflict-affected areas. We welcome the focus of this year's International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict on the technology and digital divide. We support Special Representative Patten's call for bridging the gender digital divide and advocate for using digital technology to enhance the protection of women in conflict-related areas and amplify women's active role, participation and transformative power in the work of ensuring peace and security.

The issue of women and armed conflict is one of the 12 priorities identified in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. As the host country of the Fourth World Conference on Women, China has always been an advocate for gender equality, a protector of women's rights and a practitioner of women's empowerment. We have deployed many women peacekeepers to United Nations peacekeeping operations, bringing hope to people in conflict areas, especially women and girls. China is committed to helping other countries in promoting women's development and has provided training to more than 130,000 women professionals in developing countries. China, in collaboration with UNESCO, has established awards for girls' and women's education, helping more women change their destinies through knowledge and skills.

China will continue to work with the international community to make active efforts and greater contributions to the advancement of women globally.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank the United Kingdom for its leadership in preventing conflict-related sexual violence and for providing this incredible opportunity for us today. In particular, Mr. President, I am grateful to you for sharing your experiences in dealing with this issue.

I also want to thank today's civil society briefers for their powerful messages, especially Special Representative Patten, whose remarks were compelling. From signing frameworks of cooperation to leading the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network, the Special Representative and her team have made a real difference. We proudly support the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, including through financial support, which last year was over \$2 million, and we encourage other Member States to back this important work. Finally, let me add our strong support for her participation in this meeting; we object to Russian Federation's personal attacks against her for amplifying the voices of women.

The United States is deeply committed to preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence and all other forms of gender-based violence. We know that in conflicts around the world, sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war. In Ukraine, contrary to Russian objections and insinuations, there is ample evidence and horrific reports of Russian soldiers deploying sexual violence against men, women and children, with victims ranging from age 4 to over 80. In the Sudan, girls on the way to school are sexually assaulted by the Rapid Support Forces militia and armed nomads. In Myanmar, the bodies of women extrajudicially executed by the military have injuries consistent with sexual violence. And the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/413) highlights the shocking number of sexual crimes committed by criminal and illegal armed groups in a host of other countries, including in Haiti, as we heard earlier today (see S/PV.9377).

The international community must do more to address this profound crisis. We owe it to the courageous survivors who have come forward and to those who have been silenced by fear to take swift and meaningful action. First, we must recognize that

gender-based violence is fundamentally rooted in gender inequality. We must take on harmful gender norms, and we must empower women and girls in all their diversity. The United Nations and its States Members must apply conflict-sensitive and participatory gender analysis to ensure our interventions address underlying inequities. These inequities, when combined with weak or absent State institutions, can lead to widespread gender-based violence. It is therefore on us to continue to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in decision-making roles at all levels of conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.

Secondly, we must adopt a survivor-centred and trauma-informed approach. This means providing survivors with access to medical care, particularly clinical management of rape, psychosocial support, reproductive health services and legal support. This also means listening to those who have experienced sexual violence in conflict and responding to their unique needs, which will help facilitate their recovery and legal remedies. And this means creating supportive environments where survivors' rights are respected, retraumatization is avoided and survivors have the resources they need to thrive.

Finally, we cannot turn a blind eye to these atrocities. There must be accountability. We heard Nadine. We heard Hser Hser. We must use our diplomatic tools to reduce impunity for perpetrators and deter future acts of violence. The United States is committed to exercising existing authorities to impose economic sanctions and implement visa restrictions.

I would also like to highlight the Secretary-General's recommendation that the Security Council systematically monitor conflict-related sexual violence and include it as a stand-alone criterion for targeted sanctions. We must all increase accountability within conflict-affected regions, and we can do so by strengthening documentation efforts, passing relevant national legislation and changing institutional culture.

The Security Council has spent a great deal of time discussing these issues, but we cannot discuss away the crisis. It is time for us to act. The most vulnerable — those trapped in conflict zones who want nothing more than the chance to live in peace and who yearn for justice — are counting on us. We must commit to action, and we must do so with urgency.

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): I recall the able manner in which you, Mr. President, presided over last year's open debate on conflict-related sexual violence (see

S/PV.9016), especially the interest and fervor you brought to the discussions, as well as your own long-standing contribution to ending conflict-related sexual violence. Today has been no different, and Ghana thanks the United Kingdom for convening today's important open debate.

I also express appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pramila Patten for her briefing and welcome the unique perspectives of Naw Hser Hser and Nadine. We salute the courage of our briefers and their strong advocacy on the subject, as well as the attention they draw to the need to follow through with global commitments.

As is well known, in times of armed conflict, the fabric that holds communities together unravels. Families are torn apart, civilian objects are crushed, people are displaced, and impunity replaces law, order and accountability. The breakdown of law and order in such situations is usually accompanied by extreme poverty, hunger and disease. When sexual violence is introduced into this toxic mix, the human suffering is immense, with deep-seated and long-lasting emotional and physical consequences for affected persons and communities. To borrow the words of Heinrich Böll, the German writer and Nobel Prize winner:

“war will never be over, never, as long as somewhere a wound it had inflicted is still bleeding.”

Ghana strongly condemns the unending cycle of sexual violence across several conflict contexts. Whether it is the subjugation of women and girls in Afghanistan by the Taliban or the use of rape as a tool by armed gangs against members of rival communities in Haiti, the impunity with which sexual violence is perpetrated is extremely alarming and not geographically isolated. We also note, with great concern, as the 2022 report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/413) indicates, that the growing prevalence of arms proliferation, increasing militarization, and shrinking civic space have exacerbated sexual violence and challenged safe reporting and response. The Security Council and the global community therefore have a continuing responsibility to ensure that the existing resolutions that champion prevention, accountability and justice are translated into tangible actions that can be felt on the ground.

In making specific recommendations for today's debate, Ghana would like to focus on three issues.

First, we reaffirm support for the Security Council's practice of treating conflict-related sexual violence as a basis for targeted sanctions against culpable actors. Periodic briefings to sanctions committees by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict would be useful in sustaining interest in the progress of implementation of such sanctions. Tied to the global efforts, domestic legislation in support of investigations and penalties against perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict settings would be necessary to right the wrongs done to victims.

Secondly, while we commend the progress made in the deployment of women's protection advisers as part of peacekeeping and special political missions, to monitor, analyse and report on conflict-related sexual violence, we urge the timely provision of adequate resources for such purposes so as to facilitate frequent, reliable and accurate reporting from the field to enable the Council to take needful action when it can be most effective in preventing or stopping such atrocities.

Lastly, to empower survivors, the United Nations and Member States, including national civil society groups, should be intentional in the recruitment of survivors to be part of decision-making processes and advocacy mechanisms on sexual violence. That form of empowerment, we believe, meaningfully impacts policy, legal processes and implementation and helps survivors to re-establish a sense of control and agency, as well as to recognize their own strengths and capabilities in resolving that challenge.

In conclusion, 15 years since the Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), our collective responsibility to eliminate conflict-related sexual violence and end impunity for such crimes is needed now more than ever. For our part, Ghana will continue to demonstrate commitment to the women and peace and security agenda through its national efforts but also in our regional and international mobilization endeavours. In that regard, “Women in peacekeeping” is one of the priority themes that we have chosen to be discussed during the peacekeeping ministerial meeting scheduled to take place in Ghana from 5 to 6 December. We commend Bangladesh for co-hosting in Dhaka, with Canada and Uruguay, a preparatory meeting on the theme. We look forward to welcoming all supporters of peacekeeping in Accra to establish practical measures to advance the potential of women in the arena of peace and security.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are delighted to see you, Mr. President, in the President's chair at the Security Council.

The Russian Federation condemns sexual violence in all its forms, as it does all other crimes committed in conflict and in post-conflict settings. Those acts should be investigated and the perpetrators should be held accountable. Such law enforcement activities falls within the purview of States. Measures taken by United Nations system entities and civil society complement the aforementioned efforts. That work should be systematic and comprehensive and aimed at achieving long-term and lasting results, and due regard should be given to the causes and sources of that negative phenomenon.

All of the aforementioned is possible only when the information the United Nations draws on has been verified and is objective. It is absolutely unacceptable when the suffering of people who have been subjected to sexual violence or accusations that such serious crimes have been committed are used as pawns in political games or become part of mudslinging rhetoric, which is often not based on fact.

We must also note that there is a robust legal basis for international cooperation on the prevention of sexual violence in conflict, namely, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 on the protection of victims of war and their Protocols Additional. However, we are compelled to recognize that not all States are parties to those Protocols Additional, including even some members who are actively calling for combating war crimes in the Council.

The Security Council, addressing that issue as part of its efforts to maintain international peace and security, made its contribution by adopting a number of thematic resolutions. Responsibility for such crimes is set forth in States' national legislation. On that note, it is unclear to us why it is necessary to refer, as is done in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/413), to customary rules of international law when prosecuting sexual violence. It is also unclear why the term conflict-related sexual violence is being used, as it is not a legal term, nor has it been endorsed by the Security Council.

We also have some questions about assertions that we should be establishing certain indicators of sexual violence occurring and being provoked. We would recommend that, instead of engaging in such speculative exercises, the Security Council should pay greater attention to specific situations and stress

enforcement. The cornerstone should be efforts to assist States in prosecuting perpetrators who, as a general rule, are non-State entities. A key component of the United Nations work on that front is assisting victims.

The assessments and conclusions of the report on specific countries raise even more questions.

On what basis were the allegations that sexual violence is being used in Syria as a tactic to stifle dissent levelled at that country? It is worth noting that, in the report, there is no assessment of what is going on in Idlib and the trans-Euphrates area. What is the reason for that selective approach? We welcome the mention made of the tragic situation in Al-Hol camp, where we are seeing rampant violence, prostitution, sexual exploitation of minors and human trafficking. However, we do not see any information in the report about the fact that all of that is happening on territory under the control of the United States and their allies.

The section on Myanmar is also one-sided. The list of perpetrators consists solely of members of the Myanmar armed forces, whereas crimes being committed by terrorists and militants are ignored. That does not help the credibility of the report.

The section on the Central African Republic and Mali can be seen as an attempt to shift stress from the objective fact that sexual violence tactics are being used by terrorists.

We also have some questions about the portrayal of the situation in Afghanistan. On the one hand, there is an attempt to give a general assessment of the human rights situation in the country, including the issue of the restrictions on women's rights. On the other hand, there is no mention of the impact on the rights of women, as well as those of other Afghans, brought caused by the United States' seizure of their financial resources — resources which could have been used to improve the awful socioeconomic situation in Afghanistan. In those reports, there is also no mention of the United States armed forces or the Global Coalition against Da'esh, which spent many years on the territory of the country, despite the fact that human rights defenders published countless accounts of the United States military being at least complicit in the sexual exploitation of boys.

If any doubts remained as to the fact that the report was biased, the section on Ukraine definitively dispels them. The allegations contained therein targeting

Russian servicemen are groundless and absurd. They are nothing but a dissemination of fakes made up in Kyiv. Representatives of the Kyiv regime are acting in keeping with the maxims of their Third Reich idols, and one of whom stated that the bigger the lie, the easier it is to believe. However, the Secretariat should not be participating in such information campaigns. Any accusations against States or parties to a conflict in any report should be reliable and based on corroborated facts and drawn from sources that are verifiable. Yet, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General prefers to simply level groundless accusations at States' armed forces without providing any chance for them to be verified.

Before the report was published, the Russian Federation officially submitted requests to the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for information that would allow it to verify what was said. Those requests were ignored. On that note, we would like to underscore once again that we fully repudiate the insinuations contained in the report. The actions of Russian servicemen within and outside combat environments are subject to sole command, stringent rules and regulations. Any unlawful acts are investigated without delay and the perpetrators are brought to justice.

We would like to remind Council members that the human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as other international entities, have published reports regarding numerous crimes committed by Ukrainian fighters — beatings, tortures using electric shock, threats and rape of those suspected of cooperating with the authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk. However, that information was not duly assessed in the reports regarding sexual violence in conflict.

After the liberation of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation was able to conduct large-scale investigations of the crimes committed by Ukrainian nationalists and servicemen who were present on the territory of the two Republics from 2014 onwards. Russian investigators determined and recorded testimony from civilians who were subjected to abuse by neo-Nazis and nationalists. A woman from the Donetsk People's Republic related that, on the night of 18 to 19 January 2015, she was taken by Ukrainian security service officers and brought to a

basement in Kramatorsk, where she was beaten, raped and otherwise abused. Ukrainian secret service officers threatened to do the same to her underage daughter.

A female resident of Mariupol described how fighters from the Azov Battalion, the very same one whose leaders Zelenskyy recently hugged on camera, raped women who showed sympathy for Russia and sprayed construction foam, pardon me, into their genitals. Neo-Nazis from the Tornado Battalion set up a torture chamber in the basement of a school in Lisichansk between 17 and 23 March 2015, in which they tortured and raped local female residents, including senior citizens and minors.

Those are but few cases of real crimes committed by nationalists and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which the regime in Kyiv has never investigated, to which the Special Representative has never paid attention and for which no one was held accountable. However, Russia will bring the relevant criminal proceedings to a conclusion, and the perpetrators will receive the punishment they deserve.

**Mrs. Ngyema Ndong** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I congratulate the United Kingdom on its initiative to convene today's open debate, which is part and parcel of our collective endeavour to fully implement resolutions on the important issue of conflict-related sexual violence.

Against a global backdrop of several crises, today's subject gives us an opportunity to reflect on the fate of civilians, specifically women and children, who pay the highest price in fragile conflict and post-conflict situations. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten and the civil society representatives, Ms. Hser Hser and Nadine, present today, for quite ably giving fresh impetus to today's debate.

The adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), on 19 June 2008, and resolution 1888 (2009) in 2009, establishing the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, amplified the echo of the women and peace and security agenda, specifically with regard to the need to put an end to sexual violence in armed conflict. Those resolutions marked a turning point in the way we view sexual violence, as a security issue in its own right.

The most recent report on the topic recalls, in a very alarming manner, that sexual violence continues to be used as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism against

the backdrop of deep-rooted political and security crises, which are exacerbated by militarization and the illicit proliferation of arms. The shocking situation compels the international community, and specifically Council members, to mobilize their efforts to put an end to the cycles of conflict-related sexual violence by stressing in particular preventive capacity, stemming from the promotion of the rule of law, and by investing more in three areas — prevention, accountability and institutional reform.

Gabon continues to place the well-being of women and young people at the centre of its development policy and recognizes the boundless potential of women in relation to security, stability and lasting peace. We have remained consistent in our commitment to, and advocacy for, first, accountability for the perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence and, secondly, strengthening the resilience of women, who are often the first victims.

The effective participation of women in prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding helps not just to build more lasting peace but also to make transitional justice decisions fairer and better tailored to the harm suffered by victims, as well as to their expectations.

We welcome the recent conviction of the perpetrators of atrocities in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Justice was delivered to more than 300 Congolese women who were victims of sexual violence. Similarly, we commend the tireless efforts of local organizations, such as the *Synergie des femmes pour les victimes des violences sexuelles*, that work for equitable justice and provide legal assistance to women who are victims of sexual violence in North Kivu.

By facilitating access to justice and accountability mechanisms for survivors, local civil society plays a pivotal role in the reparations process — a key component in restoring dignity to victims. To be more efficient, we recommend a comprehensive approach that is adapted to various situations on the ground by putting specific emphasis on building the institutional capacity of States, security sector reform and public awareness.

My country calls for further efforts to ensure ownership and the comprehensive and inclusive implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and concomitant resolutions, in particular the pivotal resolutions 1820 (2008) of 2008 and 2467 (2019) of 2019. We also recall resolution 1983 (2011), which was

submitted by Gabon in 2011, as a sign of its staunch commitment to this important issue. The resolution underscores, among other things, the importance of making systematic efforts to end conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence.

My country calls for an enhanced partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations, specifically with regard to coordinating their efforts on the women and peace and security agenda, not just to find tailored and lasting solutions to conflict and their root causes, but also to further incorporate the gender dimension in United Nations peacekeeping operation mandates. To that end, we welcome the increasing deployment of female peacekeepers in African Union operations, for example, in Somalia. Moreover, Gabon welcomes the establishment by the African Union of organizations such as FemWise-Africa and the African Women Leaders Network, which are effective instruments that can further the involvement of women in political processes. Those African Union initiatives deserve praise and encouragement.

The denial of justice to victims is a compounding circumstance that hampers their ability to rebuild. We are firmly convinced that, to better prevent and combat conflict-related sexual violence, we must adopt a survivor-focused approach based on the protection of survivors, resilience-building, justice and reparations. By tending to the invisible wounds of war and armed conflict and providing victims with access to the mental health services and psychosocial support they need, we will move decisively towards realizing our shared aspiration of a world of peace for present and future generations.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): Let me thank the United Kingdom presidency for organizing today's open debate on such a critical issue.

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten for her briefing, and we pay tribute to her continuous efforts to advance the conflict-related sexual violence agenda, despite difficulties and challenges. Her mandate and work are not only important; they are indispensable and must be supported and strengthened, as her mission embodies the hopes of countless survivors for justice. We are grateful to the civil society briefers for bringing their perspective to the Council and helping us to better grasp the painful realities on the ground.

Let me recognize the particularly active role played by the United Kingdom and by Lord Ahmad and the special and continued attention to the issue, including through far-reaching initiatives and projects, including the one that was presented here.

When conflicts begin, so do violations and crimes, including the terror and devastation of sexual violence. As we heard, the world continues to experience the shock of bodies of women and girls becoming battlegrounds. Like bombs and missiles that blow up residential areas, schools and kindergartens, sexual violence in conflicts, used as a weapon of war, assaults human bodies, scars minds, undermines the very fabric of humankind and inflicts immeasurable suffering on its victims. It is unbearable and a stain on our collective efforts and commitment to respect human rights and uphold the moral ground of the values we cherish.

Over the years, the Council has adopted a number of resolutions condemning sexual violence in conflict and emphasizing the need for accountability. Yet despite a robust normative framework, conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls continues in many parts of the world, used as a weapon to punish civilians and terrorize communities. That is what has happened or is happening in many war-torn parts of the world — from Afghanistan to Syria, from Haiti to the Sudan and South Sudan, from Myanmar to Mali and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and Libya. In Ukraine, reports of women, girls and children raped by Russian forces are a painful and appalling testimony to widespread atrocities and severe violations of human rights committed in an unjust, illegal and absurd war.

The truth may be hard to swallow, but facts are stubborn things. The cases mentioned and many others testify to the huge gap between the normative framework developed over the years and its actual implementation on the ground. Nadine is right — there are laws, but we need to enforce them. There are tools, but we need to make proper use of them. One fundamental issue is how hard it is to hold all the perpetrators accountable. Despite clear condemnations and calls for prosecution, far too many individuals responsible for sexual violence manage to evade justice. The high levels of impunity perpetuate a culture of violence and undermine efforts to comprehensively eradicate conflict-related sexual violence.

Another crucial gap lies in the still insufficient access that survivors have to support services. While resolutions emphasize the need for health care, psychosocial support and legal aid, the realities on the ground often fall short. Many survivors lack access to those essential services, including sexual and reproductive services, which hinders their recovery and reintegration into society. Furthermore, and worse, social stigmatization and cultural barriers prevent many survivors from seeking assistance, exacerbating the challenges they face. We must do more and better and take decisive steps in that regard. As always, the work starts at home. Member States must strengthen their national legal frameworks to effectively criminalize conflict-related sexual violence and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. Internationally, we may need to go beyond resolutions. We must come to a consensus and consider sexual violence in conflict on the same level as prohibited weapons such as biological and chemical agents. Given the pervasiveness of such atrocities in almost every context of conflict and war, it is worth the time and effort to explore other options for multilateral and global support and action, including the possibility of formulating a convention. In our view it would be a valuable investment in what we are visibly missing, which is prevention.

Peacekeeping missions should prioritize preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. Increased funding for survivor support should be directed towards programmes that provide comprehensive assistance, including physical and mental health care, legal aid and economic empowerment. In particular, greater efforts should be made to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for those who are always the primary targets in conflicts — marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General and Special Representative Patten for including Kosovo in the annual report (S/2023/413). No matter where or when such acts have happened, sexual crimes should never be left unaddressed. The severe physical and psychological trauma experienced by the victims should never be ignored, excused, downplayed or forgotten. We strongly believe that the report can constitute a robust instrument to monitor and document, on an annual basis, the progress that Kosovo's authorities and institutions have made in documenting those crimes

and addressing their legacy by integrating a survivor-centred approach into the heart of all their programmes and interventions.

In conclusion, addressing conflict-related sexual violence requires collective action, strong political will and sustained commitment at every level. Women and girls everywhere are not war spoils. They have an inherent right to be safe, to live in peace and with dignity and to enjoy freedom and equality. We must therefore do everything we can to bring perpetrators to justice, support survivors on their path to recovery and ultimately advance towards the creation of a world free from the horrors of sexual violence and exploitation.

**Mr. Pérez Loose** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate on a very important issue. I am also grateful for the information provided by Special Representative Patten, as well as the testimonies and recommendations of the civil-society briefers.

We are concerned about the information provided in the Secretary-General's report for 2022 (S/2023/413) on conflict-related sexual violence in 17 cases, which shows how far we still have to go. We deplore the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war against women, girls, boys and LGBTQI+ persons by State and non-State armed groups, terrorist groups, private security companies, mercenaries and criminal gangs.

Fears of stigma, rejection and isolation and a lack of professional support mean that such crimes have the highest rates of impunity, in or out of contexts of conflict. We urge all States to take specific measures to curb sexual violence in conflict situations, in line with resolution 1325 (2000). We further support the efforts of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security to provide verified information to inform and guide the Council's actions.

The issue we are addressing today should not be limited to a regular debate. Just this morning (see S/PV.9377), we adopted resolution 2692 (2023), submitted by Ecuador and the United States, on renewing and updating the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH). Through it, the Council condemns the increase in sexual and gender-based violence in Haiti and expresses its concern about its use by gangs there. It also insists that BINUH's human rights unit should have a specific capacity to address sexual violence, including through

the appointment of protection advisers. I will now raise some specific elements for consideration by the Council and Member States.

First, prevention, protection and monitoring should be included in all mandates and planning efforts that require it.

Secondly, we must tackle the drivers of violence rooted in structures of domination and power.

Thirdly, we should consider inter-sectoral protocols for victim care, including access to mental health care and priority attention to survivors of sexual violence in conflict.

Fourthly, we should prioritize early warning and the promotion of a culture of prevention, based on the training, inclusion and full participation of women.

Fifthly, accountability is the best deterrent. Survivors must be given access to the legal tools available in their national criminal justice systems and in international bodies.

Sixthly, it is essential to build networks, such as those of women mediators or peace ambassadors, that take into account ethnic, cultural and other identities, bringing together the needs, perspectives and aspirations of survivors.

Finally, the lessons learned in cases such as those of so-called comfort women in Asia and victims of sexual violence in Colombia or in African or European countries point to the need to explore measures that intensify the Council's efforts. Such efforts must promote the reconstruction of the social fabric, the recovery of trust and reparations for victims — indispensable elements in achieving true and sustainable peace.

**Mr. França Danese** (Brazil): I thank the United Kingdom for organizing today's open debate and the briefers for their comprehensive presentations. Brazil takes this opportunity to commend Special Representative Pramila Patten and her Office for their crucial work in and commitment to combating sexual violence in conflict. I also thank the civil society briefers for their testimonials. Civil society plays a key role in working with victims of conflict-related sexual violence, giving them ways to move forward after being the target of such an abhorrent crime. I commend the meaningful presence here today of so many representatives of countries that are also deeply concerned about and engaged in this issue.

Sexual violence adds an extra layer of suffering to the already dreadful reality of war. It inflicts long-lasting psychological trauma on victims, destroying the social fabric and jeopardizing efforts towards peace and development. More than 15 years have passed since the unanimous adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), and the United Nations has made some advances in addressing this issue — for instance, the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the launch in September 2022 of the Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.

The commission of sexual violence in conflict is directly related to impunity, which, unfortunately, remains common in most conflicts. Holding offenders accountable should be the bare-minimum response provided by States. Delivering justice to victims sends a clear message of zero tolerance for such crimes and helps to prevent their recurrence. Nevertheless, the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/413) sheds light on the need to invest both financial and human resources to support embattled States in providing justice. The process that culminated in the inauguration of the ad hoc tribunal in Guinea-Conakry shows the need for such investment.

Another key measure for ensuring accountability and lasting peace is to include references in peace agreements and post-conflict arrangements to the situations of those who have been subjected to sexual violence during conflict and its aftermath. As shown in the Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, gender-based violence drivers, such as patriarchal norms and rules, gender inequality and gender-discriminatory laws and rules, to name a few, play a key role in inciting the commission of those crimes. States should therefore also address those drivers in their efforts against conflict-related sexual violence, for instance, by promoting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes and peace talks.

**Mr. Kuymizakis** (Malta): I would like to begin by thanking the United Kingdom for convening today's open debate. We also thank Special Representative Pramila Patten and the briefers, Ms. Naw Hser Hser and Nadine, for their courageous calls to action and clear recommendations.

As a tactic of war, torture and terrorism, sexual violence shatters the lives of survivors, their families and their communities. In the eastern Democratic

Republic of the Congo, armed groups use sexual violence to control territory and natural resources, as attacks in and around internally displaced persons camps escalate. In Ukraine, large-scale displacement has increased trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. In Haiti, gangs regularly kidnap women and girls. Arbitrary arrests in Myanmar have separated children from their parents, increasing their risk of forced marriage and human trafficking. The verified incidents of conflict-related sexual violence in South Sudan doubled in 2022. Conflict-related sexual violence is often directed at human rights defenders. In Colombia, illegal armed groups enforce patriarchal social norms through violence by targeting LGBTQI persons. States have an obligation to ensure a safe, enabling environment for civil society and to protect women who are active in public life from reprisals. We are deeply concerned that the Taliban's relentless and systematic gender persecution in Afghanistan has created an environment of pervasive impunity.

The glaring gap between the Security Council's standards and commitments to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence and the horrifying reality for victims and survivors must be closed. In that respect, we would like to highlight three priorities.

First, preventing conflict-related sexual violence and improving protection requires survivor-centred approaches that ensure access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and strengthen the capacity of women- and survivor-led organizations. That is especially crucial when health services are attacked, as reported in the Sudan, where women and girls on the move are being terrorized by sexual and gender-based violence. It requires effective partnerships and trust between local communities and the United Nations. It also requires the deployment of women's protection advisers to all relevant situations of concern. Furthermore, gender must be incorporated systematically into risk assessments, monitoring and reporting, operational and tactical planning, budgets and concepts of operation.

Secondly, by stopping the illicit transfer and trade of weapons and ammunition to non-State actors, mercenary groups and individuals, we can counteract the growing links between militarization and sexual violence and exploitation.

Thirdly, the Security Council can more proactively use targeted sanctions against those who perpetrate and direct sexual violence in conflict. We fully support

the Special Representative of Secretary-General's recommendation that the Council ensure that conflict-related sexual violence is monitored systematically. We firmly believe that targeted sanctions can be used effectively to deter the commission of violence by all parties, including mercenaries and private military and security companies. More than 70 per cent of the parties listed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/413) are persistent perpetrators. Those verified cases should be aligned with the work of the sanctions committees and their panels of experts, who should have access to the data and expertise on conflict-related sexual violence. Briefings by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict to sanctions committees can greatly facilitate that important work.

All Member States have a role to play in strengthening accountability and fostering a gender-responsive security sector. That cannot be done without responding to structural gender inequality and harmful social norms. As a shared commitment holder on the agenda on women and peace and security, Malta reaffirms its commitment to advancing those priorities.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates): At the outset, I would like to thank the United Kingdom for organizing this important open debate and for its unwavering dedication to the cause of ending sexual violence in conflict once and for all. I would also like to thank Lord Ahmad for presiding over this meeting. I thank Special Representative Patten for her detailed briefing today and reaffirm our full support for her mandate and the tireless work of her Office. We listened carefully to Ms. Hser Hser and Nadine, and I want to thank Nadine in particular for sharing her personal and heart-wrenching testimony with us today. The voices and recommendations of survivors are critical to the work of the Security Council.

The United Arab Emirates condemns all acts of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly in conflict. As co-Chair of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, alongside Switzerland, and as a member of the International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, a United-Kingdom-led initiative, the United Arab Emirates remains a steadfast partner in strengthening the global response to those crimes.

Fifteen years have passed since the Council adopted resolution 1820 (2008), which condemned sexual violence as a tactic of war and an obstacle to

peacebuilding. Since then, the international community has taken important steps, but much remains to be done. In that regard, I would like to share three points today.

First, we need to bolster survivors' access to necessary services and support. That requires taking into consideration the needs of women and girls — from early-warning mechanisms to humanitarian aid provision. Those efforts can be successful only if they are carried out with a whole-of-society approach, throughout the entire conflict continuum. We must include women and youth, as well as religious, community and education leaders, in the design and implementation of gender-responsive strategies. In turn, they can act as one of the key pathways to the prevention of such crimes. That is critical across ongoing conflicts, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan, where we continue to receive an increase in reports of conflict-related sexual violence.

Secondly, the prevention of these crimes demands strengthened national judicial institutions and the consistent implementation of the rule of law. National authorities with robust judicial institutions stand a much better chance of countering sexual and gender-based violence. That could certainly be the case in Haiti, where gangs employ such heinous acts as a weapon to terrorize, abuse and control populations. The United Nations capacity-building expertise should also be leveraged to bolster survivor-centred justice and accountability, which includes supporting those who are uniquely positioned to engage with national Government entities, such as peacekeeping operations, and engaging with entities with expertise, such as the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence. Close cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and UN-Women can also strengthen global norms and standards for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. To that end, I am pleased to share the news that, last month, the United Arab Emirates renewed its commitment to UN-Women and pledged an additional \$15 million over the next three years.

Thirdly, we must utilize technology and education to combat the shifting nature of such crimes. In recent years, the threat has metastasized from a physical threat to one that pervades online space. When the threats evolve, so too must our tools to protect against them. We do not need to be overly creative. Even commonly used digital technologies such as WhatsApp

can provide access to reporting mechanisms and protection networks. As Ms. Shabana Basij-Rasikh said at the briefing on Afghanistan last month (see S/PV.9354), ensuring equal accessibility to technology can be a lifeline to women and girls at risk. Education must also be deployed to tackle the root causes of these crimes, such as gender discrimination, hate speech and incitement to violence. Education has the potential to promote gender equality and eliminate stigma. Just last month, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2686 (2023), co-sponsored by the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom, which urges Member States to support quality education that promotes the principles of tolerance to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

In conclusion, we have seen promising progress. In the normative framework, there are women's protection advisers in United Nations peacekeeping operations, and these abhorrent crimes are included as a listing criterion in various United Nations sanctions regimes. Reparations for survivors and increased access to data also speak to the direction of travel of our efforts. By enhancing our commitment and advancing the gains, the international community can better address these heinous crimes and provide women and girls with the protection and dignity they need and deserve. We have the mechanisms in place. It is high time for their implementation.

**Mr. Ishikane** (Japan): I thank you, Sir, for convening this important open debate on conflict-related sexual violence, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten and the civil society representatives for their comprehensive briefings.

Sexual violence in conflict is a serious crime that violates human dignity and consequently threatens international peace and security. Japan is deeply concerned about the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/413) pointing out the alarming persistence of sexual violence and the weakening of the rule of law in countries in conflict, such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, South Sudan and Ukraine.

In the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, we profoundly regret that the human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine have documented in detail and brought to light the distressing reality of sexual violence as a method of torture and

inhumane treatment inflicted upon innocent civilians and prisoners of war. In that regard, we welcome the fact that Ms. Patten signed a framework of cooperation with the Government of Ukraine to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence.

Japan has consistently demonstrated its proactive stance in addressing conflict-related sexual violence and has adhered to the relevant Security Council resolutions. We firmly believe that establishing robust judicial institutions and holding perpetrators accountable are crucial to deterring conflict-related sexual violence, a principle emphasized in numerous resolutions, including resolution 2467 (2019). In order to translate that belief into action, Japan has played a pivotal role in supporting the operation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and stands as its largest financial contributor. Since 2014, Japan has also lent support to the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, operating under the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Through that engagement, Japan has actively bolstered countries' judiciaries, such as those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central Africa, Somalia and Iraq, with the goal of enabling the effective prosecution of perpetrators. One of the concrete outcomes through those efforts has been the indictment of the leader of an armed group following a mobile court hearing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In recognizing the significance of addressing the practical needs of survivors, who continue to endure immense suffering, Japan places the utmost importance on providing timely and comprehensive assistance. We have supported survivors of conflict-related sexual violence through initiatives such as United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, focusing on areas such as psychosocial care and access to justice, the invaluable work of which is currently represented in the exhibition, entitled "A Conflict-related Sexual Violence Survivor's Journey", in the South Lobby. Furthermore, Japan actively contributes to multilateral frameworks, including the Global Fund for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and the Trust Fund for Victims of the ICC.

I am pleased to emphasize that the endeavours that I just mentioned are well represented in a key component of Japan's third national action plan on women and peace and security, which was unveiled in April. Furthermore, the recent action plan specifically

acknowledges the importance of providing support for survivors, encompassing individuals of all genders, including males and those who identify as gender non-conforming. We are committed to the implementation of the action plan in a transparent manner by ensuring periodic external evaluations and feedback from civil society.

A holistic response to conflict-related sexual violence requires cooperation across Member States, the United Nations system, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. Japan has demonstrated such cooperation by successfully co-facilitating General Assembly resolution 76/304, on international cooperation for access to justice, remedies and assistance for survivors of sexual violence.

In conclusion, Japan will continue to make its utmost effort to eliminate conflict-related sexual violence wherever it takes place, including by promoting the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions. As the civil society representatives stated earlier, our approach should be consistent, without double standards.

**Mrs. Dime Labille** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten and our briefers for their unwavering commitment on the ground. I would also like to thank the United Kingdom for its leadership in, and commitment to, this important subject, as illustrated by its convening of this debate today. I commend all the States that have committed themselves to ending sexual violence and are advocating the women and peace and security agenda.

I will underscore five points.

First of all, I reiterate our full support for the mandate of the Special Representative. Her role of in providing early warnings and impartial documentation is essential. Human dignity and the interests of women and girls must always be prioritized. We will continue to ensure that, in its follow-up of crises, the Security Council takes into account conflict-related sexual violence.

We share the concerns expressed in the Secretary-General's most recent annual report on sexual violence in conflict (S/2023/413). Even in 2023, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has given rise to the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and torture against women, men and children. The report also documents

abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, Burma and many other parts of the world. Earlier, we heard about the situation in Haiti in that context. France condemns the violence and expresses its solidarity with the victims.

Secondly, we must collectively fight impunity. In the face of such violence, we must adopt a zero-tolerance policy. The perpetrators of those abuses must be held accountable. The documentation efforts by the United Nations and investigations by national and international courts are indispensable in that regard. We support the strategy developed by the International Criminal Court on the issue, and we support that jurisdiction with human and financial resources. The Secretary-General's report mentions the essential role of the deployment of specialists to protect victims and analyse and investigate sexual violence in conflict. We support those concerns being taken into account in all peace operations. The Council must also implement all the tools at its disposal, in particular, sanctions against perpetrators of sexual violence. They constitute a deterrent that must be used. We support the role of the Special Representative before the sanctions committee in that regard.

Thirdly, we stand with victims and survivors of sexual violence. Care must be comprehensive, and survivors must be able to access it, including when legal proceedings are inaccessible or blocked. That is why France is providing €8.2 million in funding to the Global Fund for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence established by Dr. Denis Mukwege and Ms. Nadia Murad.

Fourthly, to prevent sexual violence and its consequences, we must strengthen women's participation and combat gender inequalities and gender prejudices and stereotypes. The physical and psychological consequences of such violence have an impact on the societies affected and can mark several generations. The full and meaningful participation of women in all decision-making, at the negotiating table and in all areas is essential to adequately guarantee the justice and reparations due to victims of sexual violence, and which are necessary to achieve reconciliation. The Council has indeed identified that need in its women and peace and security agenda, which must be implemented. Together, we must strengthen our efforts in that regard, ahead of the Summit of the Future, to be held in 2024.

As I have already said, preventing sexual violence also means addressing discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes. The rise of sexist, misogynistic or homophobic hate speech increases the risk of gender-based and sexual violence.

Finally, we must adopt the most protective standards in combating violence against women. We call for the universalization of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, a modern international instrument protecting against violence against women, which also applies in times of armed conflict. We welcome the fact that new accessions have increased over the past two years.

We have heard the Special Representative, Ms. Nau Hser Hser and Nadine loud and clear. They may rest assured that the fight against sexual violence will remain at the heart of France's priorities in the Council. France will ensure the implementation of the resolutions on women and peace and security and the provision of adequate resources for teams on the ground.

**Mr. Afonso** (Mozambique): Mozambique wishes to express its profound gratitude to the United Kingdom's presidency for organizing this timely and important open debate. We also praise the United Kingdom's leadership on this matter. We extend our deep appreciation for the comprehensive briefings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Pramila Patten, and the civil society briefers.

We would like to start by reaffirming Mozambique's condemnation, in the strongest terms, of gender-based violence in general, and conflict-related sexual violence in particular. It constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity, as recognized by Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) and by the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol, among others. The Secretary-General's report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2023/413) highlights that the crime has persisted and deepened in different parts of the world. It continued to be a tactic of war and terrorism. It is a horrific practice that, unfortunately, prevails, in spite of international and regional frameworks. It shows the extent of the commitment and action that are required to counter the full scale of the problem.

It is, therefore, with great concern that we see women's and girls' rights continue to be seriously jeopardized and violated. Conflict-related sexual violence

disproportionately affects that segment of society. Refugees and internally displaced persons from armed conflicts are also mostly women, girls and children, as well as persons with disabilities and the elderly. They are at heightened risk of conflict-related sexual violence.

As expressed by His Excellency Mr. Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, President of the Republic of Mozambique, during the Security Council's open debate on the protection of civilians held in May (see S/PV.9327), the first step towards ending conflict-related sexual violence has to be the cessation of hostilities in all conflicts. Peace is the ultimate guarantee of civilian security. We must therefore take stock of the existing international, regional and national tools to tackle the root causes of prevailing conflicts. While we are aware that making peace and building peace take their own time and pace, conflict-related sexual violence cannot be accepted as the inevitable cost of armed conflict. Therefore, all available tools, including legal, policy, diplomatic and financial tools, must be mobilized to prevent and mitigate its effects.

The implementation of international, regional and national legal instruments to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence is of paramount importance. The United Nations and other relevant stakeholders have a pivotal role to play in continuing their support with concrete actions to prevent conflict-related violence all over the world. In that regard, we welcome the efforts made by Governments around the world, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report. We commend them for their commitment to implementing their legal frameworks with regard to conflict-related sexual violence.

In order to address conflict-related sexual violence, it is crucial that we develop holistic approaches. In this regard, we would like to underline the following points.

First, we deem it important to adopt and strengthen existing international legislation at national levels, with a focus on the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence.

Secondly, there is a need for expanding training programmes for State and civil society actors in matters related to international, regional and national frameworks on conflict-related sexual violence.

Thirdly, we must strengthen the capacity of the justice sector at the national level to identify and assess information on conflict-related sexual violence.

Fourthly, we advocate allocating resources for the implementation of national action plans on women, peace and security. This could strengthen the potential of these instruments through budgeted operational provisions to address conflict-related sexual violence.

In conclusion, Mozambique reiterates its firm commitment to continuing to implement measures that can contribute to our collective action in addressing conflict-related sexual violence. It is our conviction that women and girls, who are the most affected by these criminal acts, can themselves play a transformative role in political, socioeconomic and peace processes.

**The President:** I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

**Mr. Rae (Canada):** I am very pleased to speak on behalf of 66 members of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, an informal network that represents all five regional groups at the United Nations, as well as the European Union. I would like to highlight four points.

First of all, we categorically condemn the use of sexual and gender-based violence by State and non-State actors in situations of humanitarian crises and conflict-affected settings. Sexual violence, which disproportionately affects women and girls, is not only a human rights violation, but it is also an abhorrent act of cruelty, a significant impediment to peace and a denial of gender equality.

We are deeply concerned by the persistent and widespread use of sexual violence and related impunity in many conflict-affected settings, as outlined by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2023/413). We call on all parties to respect international law and all relevant Security Council resolutions and to immediately cease all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

Secondly, we need to ensure that the victims and survivors are at the heart of all our efforts to respond to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. Victims and survivors have different needs and different perspectives and can face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and stigmatization. We must ensure that their human rights are protected and promoted, that they are treated with dignity and respect, and that they are able to obtain access to justice and

equality, holistic and comprehensive survivor-centred services, including sexual and reproductive-health-care services, mental health support, as well as counseling and legal services. But above all, we must ensure that the victims' voices are heard and listened to and heeded.

Thirdly, impunity for these crimes must end. Those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. The onus is on all of us to strengthen the rule of law and ensure that there is independent investigation of and prosecution for conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence.

Fourthly, we urge the Security Council to use all its tools to support action against conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence as a deliberate tactic of war. We strongly encourage the Council to ensure that country mandates emphasize the prevention and monitoring of and response to conflict-related sexual violence.

Finally, we encourage the Security Council to invite the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to regularly brief the sanctions committees on this critical question. It is time for urgent action to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and to ensure holistic, comprehensive survivor-centred and trauma-informed responses.

*(spoke in French)*

I would just like to say a brief word in my capacity as representative of Canada. For us, the most important thing is that we listen to the experiences of all survivors, and not just to listen to their experiences, but to act in response to what we have heard and seen. This includes women, girls, men and boys, groups as well as members of the LGBTQI+ community. Canada is committed to continuing its work with survivors.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

**Mr. Gonzato:** I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the potential candidate country Georgia, as well as Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

We reaffirm our long-standing and unwavering commitment to eliminating sexual and gender-based violence in all its forms, in times of peace and times of war. Conflict-related sexual violence is a war crime and a blatant violation of international law. It is a global threat that knows no borders.

We strongly support the work and mandate of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten. The report presented today (S/2023/413) is crucial to shedding light on the continued and escalated levels of conflict-related sexual violence, much of which remains underreported and unpunished.

We acknowledge and applaud the work of women's civil society organizations, which are often the first responders in war and conflict. While underresourced and, deplorably, targeted with reprisals, they deliver the support and services that the public and private sectors often are not able to provide, including in response to sexual violence.

We note with deep concern the use of rape as a tool for oppression, repression and political intimidation across a number of countries and the widespread reported use of sexual violence by State actors, such as the Russian armed forces in Ukraine, as well as the increasing trend of sexual violence used by mercenary and private military and security companies in countries such as Mali, Myanmar, South Sudan and Ukraine. These crimes must be punished and those responsible held accountable. It is the responsibility of all States to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence and bring perpetrators to justice.

The redress for this type of violence needs to be linked to transitional justice processes. At the same

time, we need to resolutely implement the international framework that is in place to address these abhorrent crimes and back up our political declarations with action.

EU support for eliminating and addressing sexual violence in conflict and emergencies is notable, with projects incorporating a response to conflict-related sexual violence amounting to over €100 million, and EU missions and operations continuing to address sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, within the scope of their mandates. This year, the EU has also imposed sanctions on individuals and entities in view of their role in committing serious human rights violations and abuses, in particular sexual and gender-based violence.

Sexual violence in conflict obliterates humanity. We stand ready to work with the international community to end the impunity of perpetrators, tackle the institutional culture that tolerates the use of sexual violence and guarantee access to justice, reparations and redress for survivors as well as to reintegration and livelihoods. This includes provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive-health-care services and strengthening of sexual and reproductive-health measures as an integral part of compliance with the conflict-related sexual violence frameworks by everyone, the United Nations and its agencies, but also Governments.

**The President:** There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.10 p.m.*