

Speech: Preventing sexual violence in conflict

Thank you very much, Mr President.

And as a number of speakers have noted today, the United Charter makes clear that the United Nations itself was established to protect the dignity and worth of the human person and therefore, Mr President, we join other colleagues in thanking you for calling this debate today.

Mr President, I really do appeal to all speakers not to politicise this. This is one of the worst things we face in modern times. And I think it behoves all of us, Mr President, to treat the debate as a common problem which we are all committed to mitigating and eventually eradicating. For the avoidance of doubt, let me say incredibly clearly, the United Kingdom salutes the courage both of Ms. Sultana, for your fantastic work and I'm very glad that we've had the chance to hear this before the Security Council undertakes a mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar, but also to the SRSG for your efforts and for the very comprehensive report that you have given us today.

Mr President, a lot of people want to speak so I will be brief. I think it's really good that so many members of the UN want to speak. Like others, we are committed to preventing but also responding to sexual violence in conflict. We began a Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative some years ago and that showed how central tackling sexual violence is to conflict prevention and peace building.

Five years on from the Global Summit that launched this campaign, the United Kingdom plans to hold an international meeting in 2019 to maintain a global focus and we look forward to working very closely with everybody in the chamber today to achieve our common goals. Mr President, I do agree with our Russian colleague that sexual violence is one of those violations IHL that applies also to non-state actors and I think that's incredibly important. We have the UNGA declaration of 2013. We also have a 2013 G8 declaration on preventing sexual violence in conflict and I hope that as work progresses on this we might be able to build on those two important documents.

I'd like to focus today if I may on three specific issues. The first is the importance of education, particularly girls education. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence in conflict. As we've heard from many people, including the last speaker and the Cote D'Ivoirian Ambassador, this is not to detract from the point that men and boys can also be victims but it is women and girls who suffer most. So by extension, creating a global environment where gender equality and women's rights exist and discriminatory attitudes, behaviours and practices do not, will obviously help that goal.

The British Foreign Secretary has set a personal target for the British diplomacy of helping other countries achieve 12 years of quality education

for all girls globally and we are investing our development assistance in girls' education as we know it contributes to a safer more prosperous world, reduces conflict and increases stability.

Secondly survivors stigma, the Polish representative very eloquently set this out so I will not repeat that, Mr President, but just to say that we completely agree with the focus he put on this area. The UK-led principles for global action on tackling stigma of sexual violence is a practical guide which we have drawn up to raise awareness among policy makers of the challenges. And we really do hope that the principles can be applied in all contexts where sexual violence has occurred.

Finally Mr President, justice and accountability. Again other speakers have referred to this. The survivors of sexual violence and children born through rape must receive justice for what has happened to them. This is a critical element of our prevention efforts. There has been some important progress, for example at the Kavumu trial in DRC late last year when 11 Congolese militia members were convicted of crimes against humanity for murder and rape against 37 young children.

But there is much more to be done. Although ISIL and Kosovo are not mentioned in the report, there continues to be a gap in justice and accountability for sexual violence cases from those conflicts.

In closing Mr President, can I say that we join others in urging all member states to implement the international protocol on the documentation, investigation of sexual violence in conflict. This provides guidance on achieving accountability for this truly abhorrent crime which we are all pledged to tackle.

Thank you very much.