



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9016th meeting

Wednesday, 13 April 2022, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

| | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>President:</i> | Mr. Eckersley/Ms. Jacobs | (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) |
| <i>Members:</i> | Albania | Mr. Lamce |
| | Brazil | Mr. Burkhardt |
| | China | Ms. Xue Ailong |
| | France | Mr. Samson |
| | Gabon | Mr. Doumbeneny Ndzigna |
| | Ghana | Ms. Tenkorang |
| | India | Mr. Setia |
| | Ireland | Ms. Trant |
| | Kenya | Ms. Nthoki |
| | Mexico | Mrs. Vásquez Muñoz |
| | Norway | Ms. Tranoey |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Kuzmin |
| | United Arab Emirates | Mr. Almazrouei |
| | United States of America | Ms. Kroecker-Maus |

Agenda

Women and peace and security

Accountability as prevention

Ending cycles of sexual violence in conflict

Letter dated 5 April 2022 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2022/293)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



The meeting was resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President: I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the collar of the microphone will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after four minutes.

I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation to the United Kingdom for convening today's important open debate.

Despite all the prevention efforts, there continue to be alarming reports of sexual violence in conflict. Most recently, the Security Council heard worrying reports of sexual violence in Ukraine during briefings on 5 and 11 April (see S/PV.9011 and S/PV.9014). While Japan finds those reports particularly disappointing, we are determined to redouble our efforts to assist national endeavours to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable and in particular that survivors receive support through the following measures.

First, we will bolster accountability efforts. Japan has provided financial support since 2014 to the work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, which reports to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. The Team of Experts has conducted work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Somalia and Iraq in support of investigations and prosecutions, legislative reform and capacity-building for judicial and security authorities. Its efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo led to the prosecution of the leader of an armed group following a mobile court hearing in January 2021.

Secondly, we will provide support to survivors through a multilateral framework. Japan became a member of the Board of Directors of the Global Fund for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in 2020. We will be contributing €2 million to the Global Fund in addition to the €4 million we have contributed to date, to ensure access to reparations and redress for survivors. Japan has supported the International Criminal Court Trust Fund for Victims since 2014 and has earmarked most of its contributions for support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Lastly, we will advocate on a global level for enhanced international cooperation to facilitate access to justice, redress and assistance for all survivors of sexual violence in conflict, post-conflict and other fragile situations, including post-disaster and post-pandemic situations. Japan is seriously concerned about the growing number of alarming reports of sexual violence and therefore calls on all Member States to take effective action to protect and respond to survivors' needs. We remain fully committed to working with the United Nations and other partners to tackle the issue of conflict-related sexual violence on a global scale.

Before I conclude, I would like to respond to the inadequate statement that was made earlier today by one of the members of the Council. I think that we should be humble and honest in squarely facing what has been done in the past as well as what is being done now. I will not repeat our position on the issue that was raised, as it has been explained on countless occasions. I would just like to reiterate that Japan has been unwavering in its significant contributions to the universal values of the international community since the end of the Second World War, upholding and improving human rights. I hope that most Member States concur with that.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Fifield (Australia): I want to thank the United Kingdom for convening today's open debate and for its continued leadership on the problem of sexual violence in conflict. Australia also thanks today's briefers and welcomes the analysis and recommendations in the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/272).

Women and girls continue to face appalling levels of sexual violence in conflict-affected settings, including Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Syria and Iraq. We are also concerned about the increasing reports of acts of sexual violence against women and girls in Ukraine. Australia fully supports the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, which will investigate all the alleged violations and human rights abuses.

We are gravely concerned about the ongoing use of military interventions at the expense of political processes, and about the devastating and disproportionate consequences that such military action has for women and girls. The ongoing targeting of women peacebuilders and human rights defenders, including through sexual violence and harassment, is unacceptable. We must

ensure that women, girls, men and boys affected by sexual violence have access to comprehensive support, including sexual and reproductive health services and psychosocial, legal and other crisis support services. Australia is proud to partner with the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the United Kingdom, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Rescue Committee, as well as international non-governmental organizations such as the Danish Refugee Council, to provide those support services. For our part, our second national action plan on women and peace and security, for the period 2021-2031, uses a survivor-centred approach to reducing sexual and gender-based violence and increasing access to justice.

In almost all the settings covered in the Secretary-General's report, impunity for crimes of conflict-related sexual violence remains the norm and the pace of justice unacceptably low and slow. Gender advisers are critical to embedding gender-responsive planning and resourcing into peace operations and advancing prevention, protection, compliance, accountability and justice for survivors. Australia trains and deploys military and civilian gender advisers on military, police and humanitarian relief and recovery, as well as crisis-management operations and missions. We also support the Elsie Initiative and the UN-Women Female Military Officers Course, both of which promote the meaningful representation of uniformed women across all levels of United Nations peace operations. Australia is also a founding member of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies. We are proud to be working with diverse regional and global partners in that endeavour.

Australia strongly condemns the use of sexual violence and rape as weapons of war. Efforts to prevent and resolve conflict cannot be separated from efforts to address gender-based violence. We must do more. If we are to fulfil the promise of the women and peace and security agenda, we must put an end to sexual violence against women and girls in conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Ms. Brandt (Netherlands): I would like to thank the United Kingdom for organizing today's important debate. My special thanks go to today's civil-society briefers, Nadia Murad, Mariana Karkoutly and

Hilina Berhanu, for sharing their stories and for the indispensable work that they do.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands fully aligns itself with the statements to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and the LGBTI Core Group, as well as the statement delivered earlier today on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016).

We strongly support the mandate and the work of Pramila Patten, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. As the Special Representative said earlier this morning, the world has seen protracted conflicts intensify and new crises unfold despite the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire two years ago. The Russian Federation's unjustified invasion of Ukraine is another example of grave violations of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. We are appalled by the testimonies of the sexual violence perpetrated by Russian armed forces against Ukrainian women and girls. Those crimes cannot and will not go unpunished. We must do more if we are to strengthen accountability for sexual violence in conflict and help to prevent such violence. Allow me to highlight three key areas where action is needed.

First, the response to sexual violence should prioritize the diverse voices and needs of survivors, and I am in full agreement with my colleague from Australia that those priorities should include their access to essential services for sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as mental health services. As Ms. Murad put it so clearly, survivors' voices are key prerequisites for enhancing access to justice and accountability. Best practices from our own programmes under the survivor-centred approach include setting up dialogues with survivors and local leaders to address the root causes of sexual violence.

Secondly, we need to keep investing in the role of civil society as key enablers of democracy and the rule of law. Across the globe, we are seeing cases where civic space is being restricted and women human rights defenders are being attacked or even murdered. As a result, the lives of people in settings such as South Sudan, Libya, Myanmar and Yemen are at risk, and therefore so are their vital roles in monitoring and responding to sexual violence in conflict. The Netherlands contributes to the strengthening of civil society through dedicated women and peace and security programmes and by

providing financial support to the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. However, we — all of us — should do more.

Thirdly, let me join others in stressing the need to strengthen the mechanisms for holding those who perpetrate sexual violence accountable, both at the national and international levels. Impunity perpetuates conflict-related sexual violence. We therefore call on national authorities to strengthen the rule of law for prosecuting sexual and gender-based violence. I want to assure everyone that the Kingdom of the Netherlands will always be a strong supporter of efforts to prevent and eliminate sexual violence in conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Ms. Jurečko (Slovenia): I would like to thank the United Kingdom for organizing this open debate and the briefers for their briefings and testimonies.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016), and would like to make some additional remarks in its national capacity.

The international normative framework on conflict-related sexual violence is clear. The Security Council condemns sexual violence in conflict, which presents a threat to international peace and security when used as a tactic of war. The reports of persistent sexual and gender-based violence in conflicts and the low level of compliance with the international norms by the parties to those conflicts are therefore deeply alarming. We need to do more to bridge the divide between the normative practices and the state of play on the ground. There is a climate of impunity, associated especially with State collapse, that sadly has persisted, and accountability for crimes committed remains low. Every State has a responsibility to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and ensure accountability for such acts. We need to strengthen knowledge about conflict-related sexual violence, even before armed conflicts emerge, in order to ensure a better rendering of justice and assistance to survivors.

A survivor-centred approach to preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence is essential. Access to sexual and reproductive health services and psychosocial and economic support

must be part of the comprehensive assistance to victims of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. Such an approach also calls for the full and meaningful participation of women and survivors in decision-making processes. Discriminatory practices are always precursors to violence, and more should be done to eliminate them entirely, including by eliminating multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence in times of peace. Existing inequalities are only further deepened in times of conflict and at such times access to information is of the utmost importance. We must create conditions for victims and survivors that facilitate the reporting of sexual violence and enable them to relay their experiences without judgment or stigma. Deploying women's protection advisers to peace operations is therefore crucial.

Slovenia has reaffirmed its commitments to the global initiative of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies. We are committed to advocating for gender equality, as well as preventing and responding to gender-based violence. We continue to finance projects on gender-based violence in emergencies. For the period from 2020 to 2022, we have allocated €400,000 to support a humanitarian project focused on gender-based violence and awareness-raising about child marriage. Slovenia also supported the response of the International Committee of the Red Cross to sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We are appalled by the growing numbers of atrocities and war crimes committed by the Russian armed forces in a number of occupied territories of Ukraine. We condemn the conflict-related sexual violence that has been reported in Ukraine. It is barbaric and uncivilized. It is a war crime and a crime against humanity. It is our duty and responsibility to step up efforts to ensure full compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law and accountability for violations of those laws. That will help to create a more equal world and one that is closer to being free from violence and impunity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lithuania.

Mr. Paulauskas (Lithuania): Lithuania aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

I would first like to thank Ms. Murad, Ms. Karkoutly and Ms. Berhanu for their very powerful messages. I also want to thank the United Kingdom team for organizing today's timely and very important event.

Since the first day of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war on independent Ukraine, it has been evident that Russia is directly attacking the civilian population and civilian objects, including hospitals, medical facilities, schools and shelters, and that it is committing atrocities and war crimes. As in any other war, women and children are the ones who are primarily affected and the most vulnerable. For many reasons, including deeply rooted gender discrimination and inequality predating the conflict, women and girls continue to be targeted by weapons of war such as sexual violence, including rape.

The mounting evidence shows that Russian soldiers are using rape as a deliberate tactic of war. We are horrified by the testimonies of gang rape, assaults at gunpoint and rapes being committed in front of children. There are also reports of minors being raped. In areas occupied by Russian military forces, women who have chosen not to evacuate or were unable to do so because of disability, caregiving obligations or their own preference are particularly at risk of sexual violence. The overall risk of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as human trafficking, is also increasing. Many survivors experience negative long-term consequences and post-traumatic stress and are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and social stigmatization. Moreover, many women have little to no access to health-care services or gender-based violence support services.

The sexual violence being perpetrated by the Russian army is motivated by various reasons, including the desire to punish the brave Ukrainian people, destroy their morale and break down their resistance. But it is a war crime, and Russia will be held accountable for it. All who are directly responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law on Ukrainian soil must and will be held accountable. In that context, we fully support the investigation launched by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court into war crimes and crimes against humanity and the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. All of the investigations must fully encompass and address the gender-specific aspects.

Conflict-related sexual violence should not be perceived as an inevitable consequence of war. It is a preventable and punishable crime under international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international criminal law. We already have a solid international framework for addressing those crimes, but its implementation needs work. Sadly, as the Secretary-General highlighted in his report (S/2022/272), impunity for conflict-related sexual violence remains widespread, signalling to survivors the world's benign indifference. Impunity, together with stigmatization and deeply rooted stereotypes, is silencing victims and keeping the levels of conflict-related sexual violence underreported. We must ensure accountability for such atrocious crimes, whether in Syria, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Afghanistan, Ukraine or any other part of the world. Holding the perpetrators to account — whether they are individuals, State actors or non-State actors — is essential to building inclusive democracy and fostering trust in national institutions, and it is the best way to prevent such crimes in the future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Ms. Schwalger (New Zealand): New Zealand associates itself with the statement delivered this morning by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016), and would like to add a few remarks in its national capacity.

We want to thank the Security Council for convening this open debate, entitled "Accountability as prevention: ending cycles of sexual violence in conflict", as an item under the women and peace and security agenda. We also want to acknowledge and thank this morning's briefers for their powerful testimonials and reports, keeping conflict-related sexual violence at the forefront of the Council's agenda.

New Zealand was one of 13 signatories to a joint statement in November 2021 condemning the use of sexual violence and rape as weapons of war as a red line akin to the use of chemical weapons. Conflict-related sexual violence is no longer seen as an inevitable by-product of war, crises or emergencies. Rather, it is a crime that is punishable under international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international criminal law. Holding perpetrators to account, whether they are States, non-State actors or individuals, must

be a priority, along with supporting survivors and ending such heinous crimes, which predominantly target women and girls. Disturbingly, such crimes have become a daily occurrence in places such as Ethiopia, Afghanistan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Syria, Myanmar and elsewhere. The list is simply too long.

New Zealand is determined to strengthen international and national responses by supporting the legal accountability architecture, including the United Kingdom's initiative for a new convention on conflict-related sexual violence. The prevalence of sexual violence in conflict will continue unabated unless the culture of impunity is addressed. All Member States must prioritize the implementation of laws and policies that enable a meaningful response. Eliminating impunity by prosecuting those who perpetrate such horrific crimes remains the key to ending the cycle of violence and providing justice for survivors. In operationalizing the conflict-related sexual violence agenda, it is important to recognize the nexus between sexual-violence crimes and security-sector reform processes. In that regard, New Zealand believes that a comprehensive response to conflict-related sexual violence should also include proactive and purposeful engagement with the security sector.

Working to improve the protection and promotion of women's rights in all instances, including in conflict settings, is one of New Zealand's top priorities under our international human rights action plan. Sexual violence is already recognized as a war crime, including by the International Criminal Court, and as a crime against humanity. New Zealand will continue to make a steadfast commitment to ending the scourge of gender-based violence in all instances, including conflict. We call on the Security Council and all Member States to hold perpetrators fully accountable for their actions and deny them any exemption from prosecution, regardless of their status.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Mainero (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Throughout history, rape and sexual violence have been used as weapons of war, and often as a deliberate tactic during hostilities. Although there are a number of international instruments that call for protecting civilians from sexual assault in armed conflict and recognize that such acts can constitute international

crimes, conflict-related sexual violence has continued unabated amid a culture of near-total impunity.

Deep-seated gender inequality can exacerbate conflict-related sexual violence and, in turn, further normalize it. Gender inequality is both an underlying cause of sexual crimes and an obstacle to preventing them. The work of preventing systematic and widespread sexual violence should begin in peacetime, with national legislation that takes a sufficiently strong approach to criminalizing those acts. States must ensure that their legislative mechanisms and judicial institutions are ready to address the issue comprehensively.

Sexual-violence crimes have a gendered impact and the conversation around them therefore tends to focus on violence perpetrated by men against women and girls. However, we should be broadening the discussion of these crimes to include their effects on men, boys and LGBTIQ+ persons as victims. Such cases are grossly underreported, occurring in a climate of reprisals, discrimination and stigmatization that contributes to widespread impunity for the perpetrators. Holding the perpetrators of sexual violence to account is vital to bringing justice to their victims and deterring future crimes. International law provides that individuals may be held criminally responsible for such crimes, and States have a primary responsibility to prosecute the perpetrators. When a State is unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute international crimes, including conflict-related sexual crimes, the international community should take the necessary steps to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court. The Rome Statute clearly recognizes rape and any other form of sexual violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

We are seeing an increased willingness on the part of the international community to investigate sexual and gender-based crime. However, there is a gap between the capacities of international and national courts that limits their ability to effectively utilize existing legal frameworks to bring justice to victims. Owing to the sensitive nature of sexual crimes and the vulnerability of their victims, if investigations are to be conducted successfully they should be guided by specialists with expertise. Moreover, such experts need to be available at very short notice, in a matter of weeks or even days, to catalogue the evidence. In that regard, we would like to highlight the work of the Justice Rapid Response mechanism, of which Argentina is a member. It provides help to those who are investigating serious crimes under

international law on behalf of States and international organizations and who require expert assistance in collecting evidence that can be used to investigate or prosecute international crimes. We especially value the cooperation and joint work between the mechanism and UN-Women to ensure that gender experts play a role in investigating sexual crimes. The partnership between Justice Rapid Response and UN-Women has helped build a roster of more than 200 experts on sexual and gender-based violence from more than 70 countries who are specifically trained to investigate and document sexual and gender-based violence.

Sexual violence can also occur in schools or on the way to and from them. Resolution 2601 (2021), on the protection of education in armed conflict, expresses concern about the consequences of attacks on women and girls, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, that may impede the continuation of their education. In that regard, we would like to draw attention to the Safe Schools Declaration, an intergovernmental political commitment that seeks to ensure safe education and prevent sexual violence in conflict. The declaration has already been endorsed by 114 States, and we encourage all that have not yet done so to follow suit.

In conclusion, we would like to recall that in 2015, Argentina and the United Kingdom spearheaded the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 69/293, proclaiming 19 June the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict in order to raise awareness about the need to end conflict-related sexual violence, honour the victims and survivors and pay tribute to all who have courageously dedicated their lives to fighting to eradicate those crimes, as well as those who have died in the pursuit of that endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Sithole (South Africa): We are grateful for this opportunity to address the Security Council, and we would like to thank the briefers for their insightful and important interventions this morning. In the context of today's thematic discussion and consideration of the Secretary-General's report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2022/272), I would like to highlight the following points.

South Africa is gravely concerned about the increased incidence of sexual violence documented in the reporting period. We are also concerned about

the use of sexual violence and exploitation as a tool of reprisal to target those who work to combat sexual violence abuses and provide life-saving, preventive and responsive services in conflict situations, including critical sexual-violence and reproductive health services. Such incidents have grown even worse since the start of the global coronavirus disease pandemic, which has threatened the progress previously made in addressing conflict-related sexual violence. An equal cause for concern highlighted in the Secretary-General's report is the fact that sexual violence and exploitation is increasingly being used as a tool to silence and intimidate women pursuing political and leadership positions, particularly during elections.

South Africa acknowledges the robust and well-developed normative framework for addressing the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence. However, it is urgent that we redirect our attention to the gaps in the full and effective implementation of all Council resolutions relating to women and peace and security and aimed at addressing conflict-related sexual violence. We must strengthen our collective political will and create access to adequate, predictable and sustainable financing to address the issue.

In order to focus our efforts on preventive measures at the national, regional and international levels to address conflict-related sexual violence, we need urgent and concrete action at the political and operational levels to strengthen risk mitigation mechanisms that address the root causes of sexual violence and the reasons it can recur. It is also important to ensure that in implementing political and social reforms, we create safe environments conducive to the reporting of incidents of sexual violence. Additionally, it is important that we address the drivers of conflict, including structural and systemic barriers, discriminatory stereotypes, poverty and inequality, in order to holistically address sexual violence in conflict situations. In that regard, we have to improve early-warning and early-response systems, including in periods of political instability, rising violent extremism, forced displacement and escalating armed conflict, in order to inform responses that counter acts of sexual violence in situations of conflict.

We must continue to empower the work of women protection advisers in United Nations peace operations. They play a critical role in supporting women in conflict situations and also interact with civil-society organizations, local actors and national authorities. Women protection networks and women's organizations,

in collaboration with national authorities and the international community, contribute to providing necessary support to the survivors of sexual violence. Those outreach capabilities continue to have a positive impact, especially in local communities.

It is our view that States, together with local, regional and international bodies, must focus on structural prevention, including at the institutional and policy levels. We trust that this will also ensure that non-State actors are held accountable for perpetrating sexual violence during times of conflict. It is important to underscore that prosecution is a form of prevention and deterrence that demonstrates that impunity for such crimes will not be tolerated.

Accountability and justice for victims and survivors can be bolstered through effective investigations, timely prosecutions and by ensuring gender-sensitive and -responsive security-sector reform. That can be enhanced by increasing the representation of women in this sector and by vetting and training troops and police in peacekeeping missions on the identification of conflict-related sexual violence before they deploy. We believe that can be a positive step towards filling the remaining gaps in addressing sexual violence in conflict situations. It would also go a long way to ensuring protection, relief and recovery for those affected by sexual violence in conflict. In addressing impunity, it is critical to ensure that victims and survivors have access to justice and human rights mechanisms and medical care, including mental and psychosocial support.

We commend the continued role and work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report, in assisting national authorities in strengthening such institutions, providing support to victims and survivors and enhancing accountability for conflict-related sexual violence. The work of the Team of Experts provides best practices that can be replicated in other situations where there is a lack of capacity, resources or coverage. It can further support and build on existing legal and institutional frameworks through regular virtual and in-person visits and engagement, where possible, with national and regional bodies. We must also continue to ensure that victims and survivors have access to and participate in decision-making and policymaking platforms to combat sexual violence. We must adopt a survivor-centred approach that prioritizes the views and perspectives of survivors and enables

us to better understand and address their needs with respect to justice and recovery.

In conclusion, we reiterate our consistent request that the annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence also include information on sexual violence in situations of occupation, such as in Western Sahara and Palestine.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Mr. Maes (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Luxembourg thanks the United Kingdom presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate on the prevention of sexual violence. I would like to thank Ms. Pramila Patten, Ms. Nadia Murad and the civil-society representatives from Syria and Ethiopia for their testimonies and recommendations.

Luxembourg fully subscribes to the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union and those made on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016) and the LGBTI Core Group, and I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

Despite the resolutions that the Security Council has adopted since 2008 that demand that all parties to armed conflicts put an end to all acts of sexual violence against civilians, sexual violence continues to be used as a weapon of war in Ukraine, Myanmar, Syria, northern Ethiopia, South Sudan and other conflicts, in a climate of almost total impunity. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are war crimes and can constitute a crime against humanity or an element in the crime of genocide. We are deeply shocked by the growing number of testimonies and reports of rape and sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by Russian armed forces in Ukraine, targeting women and children in particular. We condemn those despicable acts in the strongest terms, and their perpetrators must be held accountable.

As part of its feminist foreign policy, Luxembourg defends and promotes the rights of women and girls in all their diversity, including those of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. We therefore support the awareness-raising actions of the Stand Speak Rise Up! initiative and have established partnerships with the United Nations Population Fund, UN-Women and Justice Rapid Response. We continue to support the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-

General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and we have contributed to the trust fund that supports her work. In South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, my country is supporting efforts to strengthen the model of care created by Dr. Denis Mukwege for victims of sexual violence, in partnership with civil-society organizations. In Iraq, Luxembourg supports the non-governmental organization Yazda, which helps the Yazidi community, especially Yazidi women and girls who have survived sexual violence committed by members of Da'esh.

Luxembourg would like to make six recommendations aimed at ending cycles of sexual violence. First, we must prevent all abuses and violations of human rights by fully implementing existing legal frameworks and addressing the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence by committing to gender equality.

Secondly, we should support the work of documenting crimes through investigative mechanisms.

Thirdly, we must work together to end impunity for the perpetrators of crimes and thereby bring justice to survivors. In that context, we emphasize the key role of the International Criminal Court in complementing national jurisdictions.

Fourthly, unhindered access to justice, health services and psychosocial care must be ensured for victims without fear of reprisals.

Fifthly, we encourage Member States that have not yet done so to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration in order to protect children, young people and teachers from sexual violence in times of conflict at school or on the way to school.

Sixthly, Luxembourg encourages the Security Council to continue its efforts to incorporate sexual violence as a designation criterion in United Nations sanction regimes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank the United Kingdom for convening today's debate and the briefers for their interventions.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the European Union.

While today's debate focuses on crimes that are abhorrent, cruel and inhumane, it also highlights

the resilience, determination and humanity of the efforts to combat those crimes. As we condemn the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence and the impunity surrounding it, we support and stand with those around the world who work day by day to prevent and end it — women's rights and community activists, local organizations, medical workers, judges and lawyers, journalists and media workers, national, regional and international investigative and accountability mechanisms — all determined to break the cycle of conflict-related sexual violence. And here, in the Security Council, we say that the Council and the United Nations at large must continue to do their part. When Estonia was on the Council, we focused on addressing conflict-related sexual violence wherever it occurred, including in Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Yemen, and we are continuing that work now.

We have heard repeated accounts from the United Nations and organizations on the ground of the pattern of horrifying conflict-related sexual violence by the armed forces of the Russian Federation in its unlawful military aggression against Ukraine. Those reports are a reflection of how Russia wages war — through targeted, cruel retaliation against civilians, including women and children. They are also a reflection of an ideology that sees the people living in Ukraine as less than human and therefore permitted to be subjected to inhumane treatment. We have seen that before, with results that we as Member States have vowed never to let happen again.

There are people in my country who still have living memories of systematic violence brought about by aggression. Now as then, we need accountability and action to end the crimes in Ukraine today. Estonia is determined to ensure that there will be accountability for the violations of international law in Ukraine, including those that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. That includes holding the perpetrators of these atrocity crimes accountable. We fully support the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, the work under the Moscow Mechanism of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the efforts of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC). We have rejoined the referral of the situation in Ukraine to the ICC. Criminal proceedings have been initiated in Estonia under universal jurisdiction, within which evidence of the commission of war crimes and

crimes against humanity is collected. We call for the continued monitoring and reporting of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine by established United Nations mechanisms, and for comprehensive survivor-centred services, including sexual and reproductive health services. Estonia continues to support the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We continue to support the standing recommendations for ending and preventing conflict-related sexual violence, in particular through the inclusion of responses to it in mandate renewals; the deployment and resourcing of women's protection advisers; the designation of sexual violence as a stand-alone criterion for targeted sanctions and ensuring relevant expertise in the Sanctions Committees; referrals of situations to the ICC in accordance with its Statute; and by addressing threats and reprisals against women's rights and civil-society representatives. We note, however, that if those recommendations are to be truly acted upon, the Council as a whole has to start to see that confronting conflict-related sexual violence is an essential part of its work of maintaining international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank the United Kingdom presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate. The topic under discussion, accountability as prevention and ending cycles of sexual violence in conflict, is a vital one. Historically, regardless of who the victims are, violence is and always has always been worthy of condemnation, and sexual violence in conflict even more so. Unfortunately, it has persisted and taken on new forms, not only affecting the victims themselves but also eating away at and blighting entire communities and societies. Morocco strongly condemns such unacceptable and intolerable practices.

Almost 14 years ago, on 19 June 2008, the Security Council adopted resolution 1820 (2008), which specifically calls for the prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence and for ensuring that all victims of sexual violence in conflict, in particular women and girls, are protected under law as well as given equal access to justice. It also stresses the importance of ending impunity for the perpetrators of such acts.

Resolution 2008 (2011) builds on the Council's well-known resolution 1325 (2000), which embodies the ideals of the United Nations, generating great hope for the thousands of women and girls who have been victims of conflict. According to the United Nations, more than 70 per cent of the non-combatant victims of conflicts were women and girls. Unfortunately, the fact that these crimes continue to occur is a major concern for the international community. Non-State armed groups present a major challenge in this area, given their role in a majority of recent armed conflicts and their involvement in mass atrocities and massacres of civilians. Terrorist groups and other non-State armed groups promote and openly practice sexual slavery and the trafficking of women and girls, and continue to use sexual violence as a weapon of terror and a source of income. In the face of such hateful acts, indignation is no longer enough. There must be rigorous application of the existing legal arsenal. Above all we must act and propose real solutions. Effective measures aimed at preventing and punishing acts of sexual violence may contribute significantly to the maintenance of international peace and security. In that regard, I would like to stress the following points.

First, it is important to respond to the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence by strengthening peacebuilding and human and sustainable development, and by encouraging national initiatives aimed at putting an end to gender-based discrimination.

Secondly, victims must have access to justice, and we must fight impunity by prosecuting those behind acts of sexual violence and their perpetrators.

Thirdly, we must facilitate the participation of women in efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, in the maintenance of peace and security and in peacebuilding during the post-conflict phase. It is crucial to support the empowerment of women and their full and equal participation in decision-making.

Fourthly, religious leaders have an influential role to play in preventing religion from being used in attempts to justify violence. Cooperation with local actors and community leaders is also crucial, since they can identify the warning signs of sexual violence and offer early-warning systems.

Fifthly, it is important to combat stigmatization of the victims of sexual violence, as well as children born out of such violence, and the victims must receive

medical and financial support and assistance with social reinsertion.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Secretary-General António Guterres for the United Nations sexual exploitation and violation prevention strategy, which stresses the rights and dignity of the victims and calls for the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy. Morocco fully and firmly supports that zero-tolerance policy and is working relentlessly by taking every possible measure to eradicate this appalling act. Last month we launched our first national action plan on women and peace and security, for the period 2021-2024, an initiative that is part of the momentum created by His Majesty Mohammed VI's higher vision for developing a fair, democratic and equal society. A specific section is devoted to the protection of women and girls and the fight against sexual abuse and exploitation, in accordance with international standards and the zero-tolerance concept.

In conclusion, I want to respond to the inappropriate, unacceptable and politically motivated reference made by the representative of South Africa to Moroccan Sahara. I wish to reaffirm here that there is no connection whatever between Moroccan Sahara — where human rights, especially those of women, are fully respected and promoted — and the issue of sexual violence. South Africa, however, has one of the highest and most disturbing rates of sexual violence committed against women in the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

Mrs. Theofili (Greece): Greece is gravely concerned about the growing numbers of allegations of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls in the context of the war in Ukraine, and we must all echo the Secretary-General in his calls for the war to stop now.

As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Executive Director of UN-Women have recently stated, war and the displacement related to it heighten the risk of all forms of sexual violence. In all conflict situations, allegations of sexual violence must be investigated to ensure justice and accountability. That is a core aspect of the deterrence and prevention of such heinous crimes. Those responsible for such acts must be held to account by national and, where applicable, international justice.

In that regard, all States should also adopt specific commitments to preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence, protecting survivors and bringing perpetrators to justice. In parallel, we should protect the civil space and reinforce civil society and especially women human rights defenders, including women journalists, who are facing increasing challenges and threats. In that respect, women's empowerment and leadership require efforts to ensure the protection, relief and recovery of survivors. A survivor-centred approach should guide international peace efforts by focusing on providing fair reparations and ensuring multisectoral assistance and access to psychological and legal services, among other things.

Greece has recently joined the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016), recognizing the need for concrete and results-oriented international policies that are aligned, coherent and mutually reinforcing. Moreover, we were fortunate enough to be accepted in January into the Circle of Leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations, with the participation of the President of the Hellenic Republic, Ms. Katerina Sakellariopoulou.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight that Greece's first national plan on women and peace and security, which we are about to adopt, prioritizes the main pillars of the Security Council agenda, including the prevention of all forms of conflict-related, sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, and the relief and recovery of women and girl survivors.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the United Kingdom for organizing this debate and the briefers for their contributions.

We must combat sexual violence in times of armed conflict through all possible means and prevent bodies from being used as battlefields. That is the reminder of Dr. Denis Mukwege, joint Nobel Peace Prize laureate alongside Ms. Nadia Murad, who briefed us today. And 14 years ago the Security Council adopted resolution 1820 (2008), making sexual violence in armed conflict a security issue in its own right. A strong normative framework has been established since then. However, as the Secretary-General notes in his annual report (S/2022/272), impunity remains the norm and the pace of justice remains painfully slow.

Switzerland remains very concerned about the fact that the report once again shows that sexual and gender-based violence continued to be used as a tactic of war in many conflicts in 2021. In addition, data from the monitoring and reporting mechanism indicate that rape and other forms of sexual violence against children increased in 2021. Women and children in Ukraine now face an increased risk of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking. Just this week, the Council was informed of an alarming increase in allegations of sexual violence in Ukraine. We call on every party to every conflict to immediately cease committing such crimes. The facts and responsibilities must be established, and we must put an end to widespread impunity.

I would like to highlight three issues in that regard. First, we should be clear that the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence can be truly addressed only if women's participation, autonomy and rights are guaranteed. When the Council drafts mandates for United Nations missions, it must ensure that they include provisions for promoting gender equality and the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels of decision-making. In order for the United Nations to fulfil its mandates, women's protection advisers must be deployed and receive adequate resources.

Secondly, we must fight impunity at the local, national and global levels. One way the Council can support that is by including designation criteria that focus on sexual violence in sanctions regimes. We welcome the increasing use of such criteria. Switzerland supports the efforts of the International Criminal Court to investigate these crimes and to develop gender-sensitive approaches. In addition, through our civil-society partners, we are helping survivors to assert their rights by collecting evidence. For example, Switzerland has supported Rohingya women in filing applications to the International Criminal Court on behalf of hundreds of survivors of gender-based violence.

Thirdly, the rights and needs of survivors, especially their sexual and reproductive health and related rights, must be central to our action. In line with resolution 2467 (2019), we call for funding adequate to supporting prevention and response efforts, including community solidarity networks. Switzerland works closely with civil society and women human rights defenders. In countless conflicts, they are at the forefront of the fight against sexual violence and provide essential services.

States have an obligation to ensure a safe environment for them.

Fourteen years after the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), we must, as Dr. Mukwege puts it, end the use of bodies as battlefields. We must put an end to impunity. As a candidate for a seat on the Security Council, Switzerland strives to continue to be a positive contributor for peace and humanity and remains fully committed to that goal.

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

Mr. Skoog: I thank the presidency of the United Kingdom for organizing this important debate.

I am speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Andorra and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to start by paying a special tribute to this morning's briefers. Their testimonies force us, sadly, to agree with the Secretary-General that the situation is truly alarming. We are facing the highest number of violent conflicts since 1945, repeated violations of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, the return of invasions and military coups, and rising impunity.

We are horrified by the testimonies and reports of violence, including sexual violence and rape, perpetrated by Russian soldiers in Ukraine, and by Russia's repeated attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals. Those crimes will not be left unanswered. We are taking action to support independent investigations to ensure justice and accountability, in particular through the efforts of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and by Ukraine's Prosecutor General. The European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine has been tasked with assisting as well, and we are working to provide urgent support to survivors of sexual violence. We reiterate the General Assembly's demand that Russia immediately stop its military aggression, enabled by Belarus, immediately and unconditionally withdraw all forces from the entire territory of Ukraine and fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty

and independence within its internationally recognized borders.

The reports coming from Bucha and other cities recall the worst atrocities committed by war criminals such as Da'esh, in Iraq and Syria, as well as by State and non-State actors in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Mali, the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and elsewhere. There is a solid international framework in place to address such abhorrent crimes. We do not need more debates, documents or initiatives. As Nadia Murad said this morning, more than moral outrage, we need action.

Let me outline four priorities. First, it is the responsibility of all States to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence, protect and support survivors and bring perpetrators to justice. All State and non-State parties to a conflict must adopt specific commitments to preventing and addressing such violence and monitor their compliance.

Secondly, members of civil society play a key role, often as first responders. It is our collective responsibility to put an end to threats targeting civil-society actors, women human rights defenders and mediators, hold perpetrators accountable and defend civic space.

Thirdly, prosecution and accountability are key to ensuring long-lasting peace. We support initiatives to strengthen legal procedures at the national, regional and international levels, notably through the ICC. We reiterate our support to encouraging the Security Council to incorporate and apply sexual and gender-based violence as a designation criterion in United Nations sanctions regimes in a much more systematic manner, something that many have said today.

Fourthly, protection costs money. Sexual and gender-based violence programmes must be considered as life-saving by humanitarian appeals, and as part of standard funding in the area of women and peace and security. A survivor-centred approach must guide our actions, with a focus on ensuring access to psychological and legal services, as well as supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights, in line with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of their reviews.

We will actively continue to use all our tools for holding perpetrators accountable and ensuring that

women have the opportunity to contribute to the efforts and dialogues promoted by the European Union, the United Nations and the wider international community.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Kuzmin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to respond to the statement made by the Head of Delegation of the European Union. Mr. Skoog represents a major organization, the European Union. I did not respond to the statements by individual members of the European Union that, to varying degrees — depending on their respective levels of Russophobia historically — accused Russia and its armed forces of things they have never done and that Mr. Skoog knows they have never done. I expected a more sober and balanced assessment from him of what is going on in Ukraine, particularly regarding the crimes being considered. I can expect the representatives of countries like Lithuania and Estonia to say that Russian soldiers raped women and then ate them, or anything else they can think of, but I did not expect that from him, and I really am very disappointed about that.

The President: I take note of the statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation. I note that Mr. Skoog would like to take the floor again.

I give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

Mr. Skoog (European Union): I will be very brief. I just have two comments for my colleague from the Russian Federation. There is absolutely no Russophobia here or any strong feelings of antipathy to the Russian people. However, there is a very strong rejection in this Chamber and in the international community of the aggression that Russia is committing against Ukraine.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Ms. Grba (Turkey): We would like to thank the United Kingdom for convening this important and timely debate. We also thank Ms. Pramila Patten, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the civil-society briefers for their invaluable and insightful remarks.

Sexual violence is one of the gravest abuses of human rights committed against women and girls. In situations of conflict, it is often used as a weapon of war,

a strategy to deprive human beings of their most basic rights — their safety, security and dignity. Moreover, it can exacerbate and prolong armed conflicts and hinder the restoration of international peace and security. We acknowledge the progress that has been achieved within the United Nations system to generate action to combat this scourge. The Security Council has successfully linked the concepts of sexual violence and impunity to international peace and security, adopting numerous resolutions and addressing the issue in many meetings. We welcome the inclusion of sexual violence as a designation criterion for the Council's Sanctions Committees and support its application in practice. However, we see a gap between the commitments and action. As the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272) reveals, sexual violence continues to be widely used as a tactic of war and terror. The report also confirms the nexus among sexual violence, human trafficking and forced displacement.

Sexual violence in conflict is one of the leading factors triggering internal and cross-border displacement. Furthermore, victims of sexual violence are likely to face further abuses during their displacement, which can lead to multiple victimizations, including human trafficking. Strengthening penal codes and immigration laws with a view to combating human trafficking is essential. The protection framework should also cover additional support in the aftermath of abuse, such as ensuring the safety of victims, providing psychological support and extending the victims' stay in their country of refuge, in order to mitigate the effects of the trauma.

Sexual violence has consequences for all who are affected — women and girls, men and boys. In addition to its devastating impact on survivors, it has broad and long-lasting effects on communities and States as a whole for generations. Our responsibility must be to bring justice, recognition and reparations to the survivors of these horrendous crimes. Punishing the crimes is often the most important deterrent and is a key element in prevention. However, as the Secretary-General says in his report, impunity for crimes of conflict-related sexual violence remains the norm and the pace of justice remains painfully slow. In order to address sexual violence during conflicts and to ensure that these crimes can be prosecuted in the post-conflict phase, the necessary documentation and evidence must be gathered while the conflict is ongoing. The United Nations, other international organizations, humanitarian agencies and civil society

have an important task in this respect. We commend the efforts of women's protection advisers in the field and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. We call for mobilizing human and financial resources so that they can be deployed in mandated missions in a timely fashion.

Today's meeting is about standing up for the delivery of accountability and justice for the survivors of these despicable crimes. It is about protecting the lives, rights and dignity of women and girls suffering from the effects of conflicts around the world. In that context, I want to express our solidarity with women and girls in Ukraine, who are facing the terrible consequences of the act of aggression by Russia. Likewise, we reiterate our commitment to seeking accountability for the horrific acts of sexual violence perpetrated by the Syrian regime, which have long been documented in various United Nations reports.

More than ever, it is time to collectively step up our efforts for the women and girls who bear the brunt of conflicts all around the world. Turkey is firmly committed to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and will continue to work closely with the international community to advance the women and peace and security agenda and eliminate sexual violence in conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): Croatia aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016) and the LGBTI Core Group, and I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

I would like to thank the United Kingdom presidency and the distinguished briefers.

As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272) demonstrates, despite all the advances made in international law, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence remains as pervasive as ever, and we are appalled that yet another country, Ukraine, will now have to be added to that unfortunate tally. The evidence of widespread rape and sexual violence in areas under Russian control has been growing since the start of the invasion. We strongly support the calls by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and others for a rigorous

investigation of allegations of sexual violence. The Murad Code will be very helpful for this and other similar purposes.

If we want to improve prevention, we should keep in mind that conflict-related rapes and sexual violence do not exist in a vacuum or come out of the blue. The Secretary-General's report points to structural gender-based inequality, gender-based violence and harmful social norms as some of the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence. In her report (A/76/132) on rape as a grave and systematic human rights violation and a manifestation of gender-based violence against women, the former Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, highlights that the lack of a human rights-based approach, and legal shortcomings in the criminalization and prosecution of rape before a conflict, contribute to normalizing sexual violence during that conflict. We strongly encourage all States that have not yet done so to align their laws with international human rights, humanitarian and criminal law standards on rape and sexual violence. In order to avoid post-conflict legal shortcomings in the prosecution of rape, we call on all States to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court or to align their laws on sexual violence and rape with general recommendation No. 35 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on gender-based violence against women and with the model law on rape proposed by the Special Rapporteur.

The definition of rape as based on lack of consent, and the abolition of statutes of limitations in that regard, are crucial to preventing it in war and in peace. Furthermore, for victims who are unable to seek compensation through the judicial process, it is important to provide other victim-centred solutions. For example, in Croatia, survivors of sexual violence perpetrated during our homeland war are entitled to financial reparations and special care packages even if the perpetrators have never been found or brought to justice. We are ready to share our practices and experience with this victim-centred approach.

In conclusion, the Secretary-General's report warns that when it comes to conflict-related sexual violence, impunity remains the norm. We therefore support the Security Council in systematically incorporating and applying sexual violence as a designation criterion in United Nations sanctions regimes in situations where such crimes are persistently perpetrated. The prevention

of sexual violence in conflict should start at home and in peacetime, and we therefore support the Secretary-General's call for an emergency global action plan on violence against women, as reflected in *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982).

Mr. Szczerski (Poland): I should like at the outset to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the United Kingdom for having organized this important debate and for highlighting the question of accountability as the main focus of our discussion. I should also like to thank all the briefers for their inspiring contributions and the Secretary-General for his informative and comprehensive report (S/2022/272), which provides an in-depth analysis and a set of practical recommendations for a wide spectrum of international actors.

Poland aligns itself with the statement and additional remarks delivered by the Head of the Delegation of the European Union as well as with the statement made on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women and Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016), both of which reaffirmed their strong support for zero tolerance for any form of sexual violence.

We share the view that the scale of conflict-related sexual violence against civilians is of paramount concern. Humanitarian, security and political crises, compounded by the economic aftermath of the pandemic and displacement, all have contributed to increasing levels of conflict-related sexual violence. The use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a weapon or tactic of war is widespread. The most affected are women and girls, yet we must also account for the presence of male victims.

Women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of public life and in political, social and economic as well as peace and security processes is a basic prerequisite for ending conflict-related sexual violence. Such participation requires adequate and effective protection mechanisms that will focus on a strong commitment to addressing the issue of impunity for perpetrators as well as on efforts to support the victims of such crimes.

Women's inclusion can best guarantee a survivor-centred approach, including the rehabilitation of women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, ensuring post-conflict reparations and accountability as well as the establishment of vetting mechanisms excluding perpetrators of sexual violence from the security forces.

The Secretary-General's report covers the period 2021, but at this point we cannot fail to mention the horrific reports and testimonies of victims in connection with the killings in Bucha, Irpin and other localities in Ukraine, visited today by the Presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. We are shocked by the growing accounts of sexual violence used deliberately by Russian soldiers as a tactic of war and a tool of terror and intimidation. In addition, the massive displacement caused by the Russian aggression has heightened the risks of all forms of sexual violence and has disproportionately affected women and girls.

We hardly need to mention that the consequences of conflict-related sexual violence, especially for women and children, go far beyond the physical dimension. Very often they have an irreversible impact on their whole lives. What is more, that horrible trauma hits not only individuals but also whole communities.

Poland has consistently advocated for respect for and compliance with international norms and the body of existing Security Council resolutions by State and non-State actors. States have a legal and moral responsibility to protect their citizens and ensure that perpetrators are held to account. Accountability is also a means to ensure prevention. Failure to act decisively now will only encourage abusers to use those barbaric tactics. The international community must ensure that all perpetrators, including the leadership, are brought to justice. Accountability cannot be achieved without knowledge of the crimes committed. Regrettably, because of discrimination and the stigma affecting the survivors of sexual violence, a vast majority of them do not report rape and other forms of sexual violence, which not only contributes to the culture of impunity but also prevents survivors of sexual violence from accessing medical care and legal support.

Poland translates its words into action. In the case of Ukraine, we were one of the first States to refer the situation in that country to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC). We will assist the ICC in its efforts to collect evidence of the war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine. Moreover, on 28 February the Polish National Public Prosecutor's Office initiated an investigation concerning the war of aggression against the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Ukraine.

Furthermore, the Pilecki Institute — an institution for research into crimes committed by totalitarian

regimes that operates in Poland — has established the Raphael Lemkin Center for Documenting Russian Crimes in Ukraine. Its task is to collect and preserve evidence of the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Ukraine, and to collect and record witness testimonies. Accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, prevention measures and the fight against impunity remain the priority issues of the Polish national action plan on women and peace and security.

Reports of the indiscriminate killing of civilians, including women and children, as well as of cases of sexual violence, represent the most horrific atrocities; they have no place in twenty-first-century Europe, yet they are still happening. If we want to prevent a vicious circle of powerlessness towards the deteriorating situation of women, girls and men affected by conflict-related sexual violence, we need to act urgently. It is our common obligation to make sure that those responsible for such barbaric atrocities are held accountable in accordance with international law.

To conclude, let me reiterate that Poland stands in solidarity with all survivors of sexual violence in conflict and urges greater support and empowerment for those affected by such crimes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Amaral Alves De Carvalho (Portugal): Portugal aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and of the Group of Friends of Women and Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016).

Portugal welcomes the holding of this debate, which is particularly relevant given the disturbing reports of sexual and gender violence perpetrated by Russian forces and non-State actors in Ukraine. Our thoughts once again are with all persons victims of sexual violence in armed conflict, which affects women and girls in particular.

The Security Council has already adopted a comprehensive framework to address conflict-related sexual violence. The legal frameworks are in place; now we must call on all States to use all instruments at their disposal to ensure its implementation, including by making conflict-related sexual violence a designation criterion in all relevant United Nations sanctions regimes.

The Security Council must ensure that all actors are held accountable for the crimes that they commit, at both the national and international levels.

The international criminal justice system, both judicial and quasi-judicial institutions, must act, through an integrated and coordinated approach, to collect evidence and to set up and monitor criminal proceedings until their conclusion.

The United Nations is most effective when it works in support of national efforts and towards reinforcing them. We can also bolster accountability efforts and increase compliance with international legal frameworks by assisting States in harmonizing domestic laws with international standards.

Providing support to justice systems, both military and civilian, has been key to success and is the best means of ensuring that the gains made so far can be sustained over the long term. Investing in justice for victims is also an investment in sustainable peace.

Service delivery and material assistance cannot be dismissed as a secondary issue for security stakeholders. Meeting the basic needs of survivors and fragile communities is a form of protection against exploitation and abuse.

Even more important than ensuring accountability for perpetrators is to prevent sexual violence from occurring in the first place. An investment in human rights and in human rights education and training, in the empowerment of all persons and in women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making is a key investment in the prevention of sexual violence.

Partnerships with national security actors, for example, must be further strengthened. Training on sexual violence prevention should be included in security-sector reform programmes to build capacity for local security actors. We call on all States to redouble efforts to prevent and combat sexual violence in conflict and ensure that all perpetrators are brought to account.

The President: For the speakers to come, I would like to share a quick reminder to keep to four minutes, if possible. We have a lot of speakers to get through this afternoon. The flashing light on the collar of the microphone will remind speakers of when their four minutes are up.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ms. Ershadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Sir, for organizing this open debate. I also thank the briefers for their briefings.

Sexual violence is a heinous crime that is frequently used as a tactic of war and terrorism. In armed conflicts, sexual violence disproportionately affects women and girls, as well as people in vulnerable situations. Women and girls, unfortunately, are the main victims. Armed conflict also increases the risk of trafficking in persons, which unfairly targets women and children fleeing war while being forcibly moved.

During armed conflicts, international humanitarian law prohibits all forms of sexual abuse against women and establishes protections for civilians, including women and girls. In that regard, the four Geneva Conventions and their two Additional Protocols explicitly and implicitly condemn different forms of sexual violence as serious violations of humanitarian law in international and internal conflicts alike. Furthermore, numerous United Nations resolutions have condemned sexual violence against women in conflicts and highlighted perpetrators' accountability. Therefore, it is necessary for all States and non-State parties to conflict to fully comply with their obligations under applicable international law, including the prohibition of all forms of sexual violence.

Preventing and combating this inhumane practice requires a collective effort. That, however, will not be successful until its root causes — namely, the circumstances surrounding the occurrence of an armed conflict — are addressed. We believe that putting an end to all armed conflicts is the most effective way to prevent such crimes. Unfortunately, as long as terrorism, violent extremism, foreign occupation and foreign interference persist, such a solution will remain elusive. The main threats to female security in our volatile region, the Middle East, are foreign occupation, foreign invasion and terrorism, which have no respect for women's rights or lives. The situation of Palestinian women and girls is a clear case in point.

While every effort should be made to prevent conflicts, other measures to prevent and respond to sexual violence must also be taken. In addition, sexual violence perpetrated in the midst of a conflict should not be treated with impunity. It is critical that we concentrate our efforts on bringing such perpetrators

to justice. Survivors' access to justice must also be ensured.

The current situation in Afghanistan has had a severe impact on Afghan women's rights. According to the recent report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2022/272), women and girls have been targeted as part of systematic and widespread violence, amid a concerted campaign to limit their participation in public and political life. Afghan women must be given their political and social rights, such as the right to education, work and political participation.

We emphasize the importance of women's empowerment and the promotion of their involvement in conflict prevention and resolution. The achievement of this noble goal is a shared responsibility, and we stand ready to support any genuine international effort in that direction.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our principled position that issues concerning women and girls should be dealt with by the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies and that the Security Council should address only these issues if they are directly relevant to international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Zoghbi (Lebanon): At the outset, we congratulate the United Kingdom on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and commend it for organizing this timely debate. We take this opportunity to congratulate the United Arab Emirates on its successful presidency of the Council last month. We are very proud to see women Ambassadors presiding over the Council for three consecutive months. We also thank the briefers for their insightful remarks.

We were delighted to listen to Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ms. Nadia Murad once again here in the Security Council. We salute her bravery and courage to continue advocating for survivors of human trafficking and sexual violence so as to ensure that she is the last girl in the world with a story like hers, as she puts it in her book, *The Last Girl*.

Women continue to suffer sexual violence in conflicts all over the world, as we heard this morning from Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pramila Patten. Women cannot and should no longer bear the brunt of conflicts. We still remember all too well the unimaginable suffering of Yazidi women and

girls who were subjected to all kinds of barbaric and inhumane treatment by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, including rape, sexual violence, sexual slavery and torture, to name a few.

Unfortunately, such atrocities persist unabated. The latest report of the Secretary General on the theme (S/2022/272) confirms that sexual violence continues to be employed as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism. However, those heinous crimes remain underreported, as, in most cases, survivors are afraid to come forward and share their stories. We need to ensure that survivors of sexual violence in conflicts are protected and that the perpetrators of such crimes are brought to justice. Conflict-related sexual violence can no longer go unpunished.

We welcome in this regard the General Assembly initiative, led by Sierra Leone and Japan, to adopt a resolution on international cooperation for access to justice, remedies and assistance for survivors of sexual violence, and we look forward to engaging constructively in that process.

We recognize that women and girls are disproportionately the victims of sexual violence in conflict. However, when addressing the issue, we should not exclude sexual violence perpetrated against men and boys. In their case, the stigma and shame are much more intense, and many victims and survivors choose to remain silent. Particular attention should also be given to women activists, women peacebuilders, women human rights defenders and women journalists, who are often specifically targeted, including through sexual violence and harassment.

In his remarks to the Peacebuilding Commission last month, Secretary-General António Guterres reaffirmed that the world is experiencing the highest number of violent conflicts since 1945, with 2 billion people, or a quarter of the world's population, now living in conflict-affected areas. The more conflicts persist and multiply, the more sexual violence in those settings will thrive. We need to address this phenomenon and work for justice and accountability. But the most important step to take is to silence the guns, end conflicts and, above all, deploy all efforts to prevent them before they erupt.

Women's bodies can no longer be allowed to be collateral damage. Women's bodies can no longer be allowed to be used as weapons of war. Women's bodies can no longer be allowed to be turned into battlefields.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Lagatie (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, very much for convening this important debate.

Belgium aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272) paints a dark picture. We note an increase in war crimes, such as conflict-related sexual violence. Civilian populations are suffering unspeakably from such crimes, and Belgium condemns them in the strongest possible terms. We are concerned about reports of acts of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian troops in Ukraine and urgently call on Russia to cease hostilities. We also urge a full investigation into the alleged war crimes, including sexual crimes, and call on all parties to fully participate and cooperate to that end.

Although the situation around the world is tragic, there are some positive signs. Allow me to offer two examples.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while the prevalence of sexual violence regrettably remains extremely worrisome, we see some positive signs as a result of the readiness of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to promote and facilitate the fight against impunity, for example the ruling on the Kavumu case.

In Mali, we commend the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali for their support to the national judicial authorities and civil society stakeholders. We call on the Government of Mali to provide swift support to ensure progress in the legal proceedings.

Allow me to outline five priorities to speed up the implementation of the robust legal framework at our disposal for taking preventive action.

First, Member States bear the primary responsibility for prosecuting the perpetrators of sexual violence. The United Nations must continue to invest in building the capacity of national institutions, which can be achieved by developing legal frameworks and prosecution strategies and by training police units and judges.

Secondly, international criminal justice mechanisms play a key role in establishing responsibility. Belgium

fully supports the work of the International Criminal Court in prosecuting the perpetrators of sexual and gender-based crimes. The United Nations has also supported hybrid courts. Belgium supports the fact that sexual violence should be a standalone designation criterion in sanctions regimes and encourages the members of the Security Council to add to the lists, based on that criterion.

Thirdly, other forms of justice and compensation should be viewed as complementary, such as truth and reconciliation processes and traditional forms of justice. Those processes should be carried out by putting the rights and needs of survivors at the heart of concerns, while respecting international law.

Fourthly, implementing a survivor-centred approach involves several issues: guaranteeing access to medical and obstetric care after a rape, including the right to abortion; ensuring that survivors can report crimes safely, without being stigmatized or harassed; guaranteeing legal, psychosocial and economic support, including compensation for reintegrating victims; ensuring that services are available in rural areas; and adopting an intersectional approach.

Lastly, we would like to underscore the key role played by civil society, in particular organizations that promote the rights of women and girls and survivors in all these initiatives. Belgium contributes to the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Multi-Partner Trust Fund with some €500,000, including to the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, to strengthen the response to sexual and gender-based violence and support civil society.

We can end sexual and gender-based violence only by protecting and promoting all the basic rights of women and girls, fostering gender equality and guaranteeing the full, effective and equal participation of women. The Council can count on my country to continue to fight for those rights, both nationally and internationally.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria.

Ms. Stoeva (Bulgaria): Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and the statement delivered by the representative

of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016).

I would like to express our appreciation to the United Kingdom for the timely organization of today's open debate, as well as to the briefers for their very sobering remarks.

The focus on accountability as a form of preventing sexual violence in conflict could not be more appropriate. We are meeting against the backdrop of the unprovoked, illegal and unjustified Russian aggression against Ukraine. Amid all the other horrors of that war, the reports of acts of sexual violence, including rape perpetrated by Russian soldiers, are shocking and deeply disturbing. Due to the timing of the issuance of the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/272), it does not take the situation in Ukraine into account. The next one will most certainly address it, however, as horrific testimonies of sexual violence are now being heard on an almost daily basis.

Bulgaria joined in the statement presented by the United States at the close of the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women regarding the critical situation of women and girls in Ukraine as a result of the Russian aggression. Moreover, as co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Children and the Sustainable Development Goals, Bulgaria, together with other countries, presented a joint statement on the situation of children in Ukraine. It is appalling that there are reports of children being subjected to sexual violence.

Judging by the number of reports, we should not exclude the possibility that sexual violence is being used as a tactic of war. That is why we need to ensure independent investigations on the ground. Ukraine is not an isolated case; it is just the most recent one. Therefore, we need urgent action to break the vicious cycle of sexual violence globally. That should start by the cessation of hostilities and compliance with all relevant Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence, while providing unimpeded access for humanitarian aid and human rights observers.

As a firm proponent of the survivor-centred approach, Bulgaria considers that survivors, with their specific needs, should be at the core of our response, including by ensuring their sexual and reproductive health and rights and access to legal and psychological support. Furthermore, firm action should be taken against reprisals towards civil society organizations, as well as mediators, peacebuilders, journalists,

politicians and humanitarian workers, as they provide critical assistance to survivors.

It is imperative to enhance accountability for what is perceived to be the cheapest weapon of war. In that regard, Bulgaria supports national justice and referrals of situations to the International Criminal Court when crimes of sexual violence, as defined in its Statute, appear to have been committed. We reiterate the importance of the recommendation in the report of the Secretary-General to ensure that sexual violence is incorporated as a standalone designation criterion for targeted sanctions, as well as to giving due consideration to early warning systems.

In conclusion, Bulgaria recognizes that gender inequalities exacerbate conflict-related sexual violence and acknowledges that prevention starts by addressing the root causes. Member States need to achieve gender equality and realize women's full enjoyment of human rights, while also ensuring women's full and equal participation. Bulgaria remains committed to the women and peace and security agenda, also through the implementation of its national action plan for the period 2020-2025.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Massari (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statements submitted on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016), and the United Nations LGBTI Core Group. I would like to add a few remarks in a national capacity.

The protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls in the fight against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, in times both of peace and of armed conflict, are a long-standing commitment of Italy. We staunchly support the mandate of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten and the work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict through our pledge in favour of the related Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Multi-Partner Trust Fund.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272) paints a bleak picture of the current situation. In various parts of the world, State and non-State actors still use sexual violence as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism. We are also particularly concerned about the increase in the incidence of rape

and other forms of sexual violence against children in 2021, based on data collected by the monitoring and reporting mechanism, with growing instances of girls affected by violations.

I take this opportunity to reiterate Italy's firm condemnation of the unjustified aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and our full support to Ukraine and its people. We are deeply concerned about the repeated attacks on civilians, including women and children, and about the testimonies and reports of conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls, including rape, perpetrated by the Russian armed forces. Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, is a heinous violation of human rights and war crimes. We must spare no effort to prevent and combat such brutal forms of violence, support survivors and bring perpetrators to justice.

Let me outline Italy's five priorities.

First, the prevention of widespread and systematic sexual violence begins in times of peace through the adoption of national laws that should be robust enough to prevent abuses and violations in war time. There exists a solid international framework that needs to be implemented.

Secondly, we need a strong paradigm shift to uphold a culture of gender equality and fully promote women's empowerment and their equal, full and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Female leadership opportunities are essential to both prevention and reconciliation at the national and international levels, involving women and grass-roots civil society organizations.

Thirdly, In line with resolution 2467 (2019), we need survivor-centred approaches to prioritize the rights and needs of victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

Fourthly, United Nations peacekeeping missions play a crucial role in preventing and combating conflict-related sexual violence within their mandate to protect civilians. To that end, over the past years, Italy has been providing troops with training on gender issues, and has been promoting a stronger presence of women among the ranks of peacekeepers.

Fifthly, the international community should fight against impunity and hold the perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence accountable. To that end, we need to assist conflict-torn countries and guide them in

reforming their judicial systems by strengthening the rule of law and their accountability mechanisms.

Let me conclude by affirming Italy's strong commitment to preventing and tackling sexual violence in conflicts. We will continue to support the work of the Secretary-General and that of his Special Representative in order to pursue better and increasingly tangible results in this field.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Ms. Oehri (Liechtenstein): Despite a robust legal framework, including the respective Security Council resolutions, sexual violence continues to occur in many conflicts, often in a systematic manner. The latest shocking examples are the mounting reports of sexual violence in apparent use as a weapon of war in Ukraine, one of numerous aspects of systematic violations of international humanitarian law resulting from the Russian aggression. The ongoing reports of rape and abduction in Ethiopia and Myanmar continue to be very alarming. All three situations require the urgent attention of the respective commissions of inquiry and accountability mechanisms established by Human Rights Council. In the case of Ukraine, we will be looking for expeditious investigations by the International Criminal Court.

We remain concerned about sexual and gender-based violence against women, girls, men and boys, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, which is used as a weapon of war to attack civilian populations and break societies, communities and families, as also documented by All Survivors project in Afghanistan and Syria, among other places. Such acts are not only morally repugnant, but they are categorically prohibited under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. They constitute war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity and genocide.

Concrete, time-bound preventive measures, as explicitly outlined in resolutions 2106 (2013) and 2467 (2019), are necessary to bring an end to conflict-related sexual violence. We reiterate our call on the Security Council to include conflict-related sexual violence as a designation criterion in targeted sanctions regimes.

Accountability is key to addressing conflict-related sexual violence. International criminal justice mechanisms have significantly advanced our efforts

to fight impunity. In 1998, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda broke new ground when it found in the Akayesu case that rape and sexual assault constitute an act of genocide. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has played a pioneering role in establishing a comprehensive and victim-centred framework to expansively and efficiently respond to crimes of conflict-related sexual violence. For the first time in history, it firmly established conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence as a crime against humanity and a war crime. We commend the Office of the Prosecutor for including charges related to sexual and gender-based crimes in many of its cases and for prioritizing such crimes as a matter of policy. The ICC judgment against Dominic Ongwen succeeded in painting a comprehensive picture of sexual and gender-based crimes suffered by victims and constitutes an important precedent for future cases.

Where the ICC does not have jurisdiction, we must look for other options. In the case of Syria, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) supports prosecutions for the most serious crimes under international law, offering a path towards justice for the crimes committed, including sexual violence. Its terms of reference notes the need for dedicated expertise on sexual violence. We look forward to the publication of the IIIM's gender strategy and implementation plan in the coming months.

Armed conflicts and the related displacement result in increased vulnerability and a heightened risk of human trafficking, including for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Our collective fight against human trafficking must include leveraging the crucial role played by the financial sector in ending those crimes, as also called for resolution 2331 (2016).

The Liechtenstein Finance against Slavery and Trafficking initiative engages the financial sector so as to tackle such crimes. It emphasizes the role of financial inclusion and economic empowerment as a major means to prevent vulnerability in the first place. Among many other actions, it has undertaken activities with respect to the risk of human trafficking as a result of the massive refugee flows in Ukraine, both in the area of prevention and the financial inclusion of the Ukrainian people who have come to our country as refugees due to the Russian aggression.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Ms. Leendertse (Germany): At the outset, I would like to thank the United Kingdom for hosting this open debate. I also thank Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Nadia Murad and Ms. Mariana Karkoutly, as well as Ms. Hilina Berhanu, for their important contributions.

The increase in conflict-related sexual violence illustrated by the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2022/272) is alarming. We are appalled by the reports of sexual and gender-based violence against women and children in Ukraine committed by the Russian armed forces and mercenaries. The pictures and accounts from Bucha are shocking; egregious crimes were committed. Germany stands in solidarity with all Ukrainians, including women and girls, in all their diversity, affected by Russia's unprovoked war of aggression in Ukraine.

In Afghanistan, women and young girls are subjected to forced marriages and sexual and gender-based violence on a daily basis, while impunity prevents survivors from access to justice and to support services, since specialized courts on violence against women were closed. In Myanmar, widespread and systematic violence has emerged since the military takeover, with excessive force, including sexual and gender-based violence, against protesters, journalists, activists, women peacebuilders and women in leadership. The numerous displaced women and girls from Syria face heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as forced and early marriage. The Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen in Geneva has documented in its reports atrocious accounts of cases of sexual violence against Yemeni women, children and men. That important documentation is no longer being carried out, because the Group's mandate was not renewed last year. We must hold all the perpetrators of such crimes and others accountable.

Committed to advancing accountability in general, Germany assumed the co-Chair of the States and Donors Working Group of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies. At the national level, a higher regional court in Koblenz convicted a former official of the Syrian General Intelligence Service for crimes against humanity, including acts of sexual violence, committed in 2011 and 2012.

Last week, the German Foreign Minister announced the dedication of an additional €1 million in funding to

the International Criminal Court for the investigation of Russian war crimes in Ukraine. We must protect and enable organizations defending international humanitarian law and international human rights law and ensuring accountability for violations thereof.

A survivor-centred approach is essential to preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. Three years after the adoption of resolution 2467 (2019), put forward by Germany, we are concerned about its slow implementation. The international community must strengthen survivors' rights and improve their access to justice, sexual and reproductive health services, rehabilitation, reparations and reintegration.

In 2021, German humanitarian assistance funded projects with vital gender-based violence components, totalling an amount of more than \$80 million. That made Germany the largest donor of the Oslo pledging conference. Germany is also the largest donor to the special appeal on sexual and gender-based violence of the International Committee of the Red Cross. This year, German humanitarian assistance launched a new project with UN-Women to strengthen sexual and gender-based violence measures in humanitarian response plans.

There can be no effective measures against conflict-related sexual violence without real gender equality, the protection and promotion of human rights, and women's and girls' full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making. Germany will pursue its strong commitment to all of these aspects, including in the framework of its feminist foreign policy, and hopes to be able to count on the support of many other partners in this Chamber in this important endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Denmark.

Mr. Hermann (Denmark): I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries — Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and of course my own country, Denmark.

Let me begin by thanking the briefers — Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pramila Patten, Ms. Nadia Murad, Ms. Hilina Berhanu and Ms. Mariana Karkoutly, for their sobering updates this morning, and more importantly for their crucially

important work in addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

Conflict-related sexual violence is a horrifying reality. It is widely used to deliberately target civilian populations in order to inflict long-term trauma, dehumanize and humiliate victims, fracture families and destroy the social fabric of communities. As documented by the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272), conflict-related sexual violence is a violation that cuts across many geographies. To name just a few contexts of concern, reports show that women and girls have been targeted in Afghanistan through systematic and widespread sexual and gender-based violence. In northern Ethiopia, it is well documented that sexual and gender-based violence, rape and sexual torture have been used by both sides of the conflict as systematic weapons of war on a horrific scale. In Ukraine, initial accounts of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by Russian soldiers are extremely alarming, and the current large-scale displacement in Ukraine is heightening the risk of human trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse for women, children and persons belonging to LGBTIQ+ communities in particular.

The Nordic countries finds impunity for these horrific acts unacceptable, and to ensure accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, we need to do the following. First, sexual and gender-based violence must be incorporated as a stand-alone designation criterion for targeted sanctions by the Security Council.

Secondly, as also pointed out by the Secretary-General, we need to enhance coherence between the practice of listing and the designation of parties for the imposition of targeted and graduated measures. The low levels of compliance with the framework on conflict-related sexual violence put in place by the Security Council starting in 2008 is simply not acceptable. An alarming 70 per cent of the parties listed in the report of the Secretary-General are persistent perpetrators and have appeared on the Secretary-General's list for five or more years now.

Thirdly, to ensure better accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, we must focus on both State and non-State actors. State parties are often not scrutinized enough, and, similarly, among non-State actors, we see a lack of focus on the role of private military and security actors, including the Wagner Group. We would like to encourage the United Nations to contribute

to shedding the light on the role of State parties and private military and security actors with regard to conflict-related sexual violence and the possibility of adding them to the Secretary-General's list.

Fourthly, we call on the United Nations and its States Members to support investigations and prosecutions of conflict-related sexual violence and to ensure the safe participation of survivors and witnesses in judicial processes. Accountability, compliance and reparations can only be ensured through the adoption of strong national, legal and policy frameworks on sexual and gender-based violence and remedies for survivors.

Fifthly, the Security Council must reflect prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence in mandates for the renewal of peace operations. We also call for further deployment of women protection advisers and child protection advisers to both United Nations peace operations and the offices of United Nations resident and humanitarian coordinators in relevant contexts. We note that they play a key role in reporting on and addressing conflict-related sexual violence in the field.

We already have the required normative and legal framework to address conflict-related sexual violence and other forms of violence committed against civilians in armed conflicts, including women and children. What is urgently needed now is accelerated implementation of the existing legal and normative framework, which requires substantial political will as well as funding.

An increased focus on protection cannot come at the expense of the promotion of women's full, equal and meaningful participation. We need to promote participation, protection and prevention simultaneously. Intervention must take a survivor-centred approach and include survivors' access to basic health services and rights, including sexual and reproductive-health and reproductive-rights services, mental-health and psychosocial support, efforts to prevent child marriages and access to justice. Intervention must build on and further strengthen partnerships with women-led and women-focused organizations, as well as LGBTQI+ organizations, including through capacity-strengthening and sufficient rapid and flexible funding and core funding.

The Nordic countries will continue to work to end impunity and ensure accountability for all acts of conflict-related sexual violence in collaboration with

all partners, including civil society and women-led organizations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Kulháněk (Czech Republic): The Czech Republic aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016). I would like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

First and foremost, I would like to join others in thanking the United Kingdom for bringing this important debate to the Security Council. Accountability for conflict-related sexual violence and its prevention call for continuous attention from the Council. Every year, there are thousands upon thousands of victims of conflict-related sexual violence, most of them women and girls. These sexual violence crimes, in a sickening way, only add to the anguish and suffering inflicted by armed conflicts and humanitarian crises in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, South Sudan, Syria, and, most recently, Ukraine.

We are deeply concerned about all cases of sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse. Discrimination against women and girls in all their diversity are only worsened in armed conflicts. Moreover, all forms of violence further undermine the full, equal and meaningful participation of all women and girls in political, social, economic and peacebuilding processes.

Perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence often remain unidentified. Justice for the victims is therefore rarely achieved. Victims only seldom have access to the necessary social and health services, including sexual and reproductive-health services. This needs to change. Efforts to strengthen prevention and accountability must be accelerated. We must end the culture of impunity. We have the international framework for that, and the time for its implementation is long overdue.

Following the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the situation in the country raises particular concerns with respect to what we are discussing in this Chamber today. We once again call on Russia to end its military aggression, withdraw all its forces from the entire

territory of Ukraine and stop violating international humanitarian and human rights law.

We have been witnessing brutal sexual and gender-based attacks on women and girls systematically perpetrated by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are used as part of Russian tactics to intimidate civilian populations and protesters, and punish and deter non-governmental organizations, journalists and media workers.

Moreover, there are reports of cases of rape and sexual violence in which they have become some perverse form of entertainment for members of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine. The Russian Federation must be held accountable for those and other unacceptable breaches of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. All crimes by Russia in Ukraine, including the widespread use of sexual violence, must be properly investigated and brought to justice.

Let me stress that all perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence, everywhere in the world, must be held accountable. Ensuring prevention and justice for victims and a zero-tolerance policy is the only way to end conflict-related sexual violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Ms. Hussain (Maldives): Thank you, Madam, for convening the annual debate on conflict-related sexual violence under the agenda item “Women and peace and security”. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/272) and to the briefers for their invaluable insights.

We are currently living in a world marred by multiple conflicts and humanitarian crises. We continue to be alarmed by reports of conflict-related sexual violence and its prevalence in conflict areas around the world. It is essential that the perpetrators of those heinous crimes are brought to justice. To use sexual violence as a weapon to terrorize vulnerable populations and violate their dignity and most basic rights is grotesque and outrageous.

In that regard, Maldives recalls resolution 1325 (2000), which compels all parties to the conflict, including non-State parties, to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual violence. The perpetrators of those crimes — regardless of the

conflict, the side of the conflict on which they fought and whether it is still an active or a post-conflict situation — must be held accountable for their actions and brought to justice. We encourage all investigations and prosecutions to be full, fair and centred on justice for the victims.

As a peace-loving nation, Maldives welcomes the Secretary-General’s recommendation that women’s inclusion and participation in leadership roles in political, peacekeeping, security and rule-of-law institutions are fundamental to our efforts to build a durable and peaceful society.

In that regard, we have implemented various policies, including a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of gender-based violence, and have enacted acts on the prohibition of sexual harassment and abuse, on sexual offences and on the prevention of domestic violence prevention. We have also enacted a social protection act to raise awareness and create the fundamental necessary conditions for the protection of all women and girls.

The Secretary-General’s report is a stark reminder of the tremendous amount of work that remains to be completed to eliminate the abhorrent crimes of sexual violence. We must commit to implementing a survivor-centred approach to preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and address sexual violence and work to eliminate it at its root cause.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I congratulate the United Kingdom for organizing this timely open debate and for the way in which has led the work of the Council since the beginning of April. I am grateful for the comprehensive and courageous information provided by the briefers this morning, which constitutes evidence of an unacceptable situation.

While the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272) focuses on recent history, it reflects patterns of violence and of cruelty that have been on the rise since the 1990s. Conflicts share common denominators and, unfortunately, the reports show that sexual violence is one of them. For that reason, we condemn all acts of armed aggression and occupation because they open the door to torture and brutality.

Ecuador therefore condemns sexual violence in any context, whether in a conflict or post-conflict situation and wherever it may occur — whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Ukraine or anywhere else in the world. Ecuador does not see how we can call ourselves a civilization while at the same time we contemplate acts of barbarity, such as sexual violence, as a tactic of war.

The Council must promote effective mechanisms to prevent sexual violence. As reflected in the topic of today's debate, an effective way to do so is through responsibility, accountability, zero-tolerance approaches and non-impunity for those who commit such acts, as well as those who encourage or conceal them, as many delegations have already mentioned.

Ecuador agrees with the content of the report of the Secretary-General contained in S/2022/77 and wishes to draw particular attention to paragraph 27, which highlights the need for an interconnected and interdependent application of judicial and non-judicial measures in line with international standards and in coordination with peace and political processes.

Yesterday, my delegation attended the Security Council briefing on Colombia in this very Chamber (see S/PV.9015). I take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of our neighbouring country in implementing the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, which leads me to recall, as reflected in the report of the Secretary-General I mentioned, certain practices of sexual violence by armed groups such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo, including against its own members.

While justice at local, regional and international levels is key to preventing sexual violence, it is not limited to sentencing those responsible but must also be supported by improved legal and health services with a gender perspective and a focus on the interests of survivors, as underscored in resolution 2467 (2019).

My delegation noted with deep concern the Security Council briefing of 11 April (see S/PV.9014), in particular with regard to the increasing reports of sexual violence and trafficking of women and girls in the context of the mass displacement resulting from the military aggression against and invasion of Ukraine, which Ecuador once again condemns.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Aidid (Malaysia): I thank you, Madam, for convening this open debate. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the other briefers for their valuable remarks on the subject.

Malaysia remains deeply concerned by the heightened risk of sexual violence against civilians, particularly women and children in conflict. The report of the Secretary-General last year (S/2021/312) revealed the disturbing fact that a number of parties to armed conflict continue to use sexual violence as a cruel tactic of war, terror and political repression in order to advance their strategic objectives. That heinous crime must stop.

Malaysia continues to support — and underscores the importance of — addressing sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations in an integrated and holistic manner by all stakeholders, including States, the United Nations system and civil society. In that connection, Malaysia is pleased that the recent conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women contained vital language emphasizing the need to address sexual and gender-based violence, both during and in the aftermath of conflict, including by adopting preventive approaches and taking into account the needs and perspectives of victims and survivors.

Moving forward, we need to ensure accountability, including through effective prevention and protection mechanisms. In addition, measures to prevent and address sexual violence should be strategically aligned with efforts to prevent violent extremism. In that connection, I wish to highlight the following points.

First, it is incumbent on States to introduce or strengthen legislation and judicial processes to document, investigate and prosecute sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. Malaysia views accountability as a duty under both domestic and international law. In that regard, national systems should be pushed to meet international standards for ensuring accountability and justice so that perpetrators of such crimes will never go unpunished. Assistance to survivors, such as psychological support and access to justice, must also be prioritized. We also call for provisions on sexual violence in conflict to be integrated into all peace processes, negotiations and agreements.

Secondly, we see merits in broadening networking and coordination between the Security Council and the Human Rights Council towards ensuring accountability

for human rights violations, including sexual assault and violence against women and children.

Thirdly, prevention efforts will not succeed without women's inclusive participation. Participation also matters for protection and is key to peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Women's participation in the security framework can advance citizens' trust in institutions and contribute towards improving intelligence-gathering, reporting of gender-based violence and treatment of victims, witnesses and suspects. At the same time, we need to end the harassment and reprisals targeting women in peace and security processes.

Malaysia remains committed to the women and peace and security agenda and the collective efforts to combat sexual violence in conflict, including through United Nations peacekeeping operations. Since 2014, the Malaysian Peacekeeping Centre has continued to teach courses on gender and the role of women in peacekeeping missions, such as "Maintaining a gender adviser, the comprehensive protection of civilians, combating sexual exploitation and abuse, women and peace and security, gender mainstreaming and preventing sexual violence in conflict. Those programmes have benefited more than 900 military and civilian personnel, including 190 foreign participants and nine Malaysian battalion contingents to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

Malaysia is also a signatory to the voluntary compact, which reaffirms its strong commitment to address sexual exploitation and abuse comprehensively and effectively.

It is more crucial than ever to address the persistent impunity and vacuum of justice and accountability for sexual violence in conflict. Let me conclude by stressing the importance of the Security Council urgently working with relevant stakeholders and partners in our collective efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians, including women and children, in conflict situations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Ms. Bassols Delgado (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier today on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016), as well as with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the United Nations LGBTI Core Group.

We take note of the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/272) and endorses its content. Spain will also continue to support the mandate of Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We are observing how — in contexts affected by armed conflict, such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, the Central African Republic, Syria, Yemen or Ukraine — the blatant use of rape as a weapon of war has once again become evident.

Today more than ever, it is still necessary to shine a light on conflict-related sexual violence. Almost 15 years ago, resolution 1820 (2008) declared conflict-related sexual violence a peace and security problem in its own right. The three subsequent resolutions focusing on that human rights violation and today's open debate are a testament to how much remains to be done and to the urgency of finding answers for the prevention and condemnation of an expanding tactic of warfare shielded by impunity. Accountability as a preventive and reactive instrument must become an effective tool to combat the impunity with which State and non-State actors commit these crimes against humanity.

Spain believes that we must prioritize the inclusion of sexual violence as an independent criterion for the imposition of targeted United Nations sanctions and the deployment of protection advisers for the prevention and early warning of sexual violence in all conflict situations. Gender equality, the promotion of human rights and the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in their societies are the pillars of any prevention strategy, as the fight against sexual violence is also linked to the dismantling of patterns of gender inequality and discrimination prior to the outbreak of any armed conflict.

We also want to shine a light on the stigmas associated with sexual violence and their consequences for the victims. The lack of solid institutions in countries in conflict leads to significant weaknesses in the mechanisms and public networks for the protection of victims of sexual violence, the inability to address complaints and protect victims and significant impediments to the effective investigation and prosecution of such crimes.

For that reason, Spain understands the critical importance of supporting civil society organizations, in particular women's organizations, which play a critical role in disseminating information on

prevention, protection and access to services so as to assist women and girl survivors of sexual violence and gathering evidence to combat impunity and demand accountability.

With regard to Ukraine, we demand that Russia immediately cease its military aggression, withdraw all troops from the entire Ukrainian territory and respect its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, as pursuant to General Assembly resolution A/ES-11/1 of 2 March. We condemn in the strongest terms the crimes committed in Bucha and all cases of sexual violence that are coming to light in the war imposed on Ukraine by the Russian Federation, regardless of who the perpetrators are.

We would like to emphasize the urgency of sending experts with gender training to investigate incidents of sexual violence in the country, as well as the need to create safe environments in transit and destination countries in order to prevent the trafficking of women and children fleeing the war and to protect the victims.

In that regard, it is essential for Spain to support the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration. My country therefore calls on all parties to the conflict to prevent sexual and gender-based violence on the way to and from schools and educational institutions.

Finally, although Afghanistan is no longer at war, we would like to take this opportunity to denounce the gender apartheid that Afghan women and girls still suffer in this country and to continue to express our support and solidarity.

Combating sexual violence is a priority in Spain's feminist foreign policy, which makes gender equality and the rights of all women and girls a central objective of all its actions. We hope that our actions will contribute to this important work.

The President: As we still have a large number of speakers inscribed on the list, I would like once again to remind all speakers to keep their statements to no more than four minutes.

I give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): First of all, let me express our special thanks to you, Madam President, for organizing this important meeting. We wish the United Kingdom presidency of the Security Council for this month every success. We are proud of your conduct of the presidency thus far, and we wish you the very best.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016).

This debate will focus on accountability, as prevention is crucial. We consider it important to increase our joint efforts to end the heinous practice of sexual violence in conflict also through empowerment, gender equality and access to justice. It is crucial that the Security Council continue to address various aspects of conflict within the framework of thematic debates such as this one. Today's debate also contributes to the systematic advancement of the women and peace and security agenda in the work and decision-making of the Council.

Let me thank the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ms. Nadia Murad and the other briefers for their insightful presentations.

Slovakia considers prevention to be the cornerstone of United Nations efforts aimed at peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The women and peace and security agenda, together with the goals of inclusivity and gender equality, definitely fits into the broader prevention agenda of the Secretary-General. The women and peace and security agenda is also instrumental in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 5 and SDG 16, which recognize gender equality as well as peace, justice and strong institutions as global development priorities.

As co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, Slovakia wishes to recall resolution 2151 (2014), on security-sector reform, which underscores the importance of women's equal, meaningful and effective participation and full involvement in the security sector in order to build inclusive, accountable and legitimate institutions that more effectively protect populations and promote lasting peace and sustainable development. Gender-sensitive security-sector reform is key to developing security-sector institutions that are non-discriminatory, representative of the population and capable of effectively responding to the specific security needs of diverse groups, thereby playing a crucial role in prevention.

Reforming the security sector, as we have seen in many conflict contexts, must also include the reform of recruitment processes and an improvement in the

delivery of security services to address and prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his recent report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2022/272) and commend his commitment and leadership in connection not only with the women and peace and security agenda but also with his efforts in implementing a zero-tolerance policy with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse.

On the other hand, we are deeply concerned by the observation made in the report that the year 2021 was marked by continuing recourse to military rather than diplomatic and political means, which led to displacement on a significant scale, exposing civilians to heightened levels of sexual violence. The report likewise clearly states that rising inequality, increased militarization, reduced civic space and the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons also contributed, among other factors, to fuelling widespread and systematic conflict-related sexual violence, even in the midst of a global pandemic, which is particularly disturbing.

Slovakia fully supports the approach of the Secretary-General, which is based on prioritizing the rights and dignity of survivors. An intrinsic part of such dignity lies in holding perpetrators accountable. That is absolutely crucial. Various Security Council resolutions recognize that sexual violence can itself constitute a war crime or a crime against humanity; unfortunately, most of the perpetrators of those acts continue to escape justice. Member States have to continue working closely with the United Nations in order to combat impunity for any and all such crimes. The Security Council should closely consider referrals to the International Criminal Court when gender-based violence and gender-based crimes are committed. The primary responsibility, though, for prosecuting such crimes lies with States, which should adopt sufficiently robust national criminal legislations as the best means of prevention.

Last but not least, we deplore in the strongest terms the ongoing unjustified and unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine, in a blatant violation of international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The images that the world has recently seen have plumbed the depths of a living hell following the Russian decision to start that senseless war. The acts of sexual violence perpetrated by the Russian forces, including gang rapes, rapes in front

of children and other similar practices, are among the most hideous violations of international humanitarian law and laws of armed conflict. We call on the Russian authorities to take immediate and effective measures to stop such inhuman and brutal practices and bring the perpetrators to justice rather than continuously coming up with lies, cover-up stories and excuses.

Let me say my last sentence in Russian, a language that I studied for many years and that I used to teach, so I speak it quite well.

(spoke in Russian)

Let me be very clear: such behaviour is unforgivable under any circumstances, and there should be no impunity for such crimes for anyone. That should be crystal-clear to everyone, in all situations in which we find ourselves.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) *(spoke in Arabic)*: At the outset, my country's delegation congratulates the United Kingdom on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month and on convening today's meeting successfully.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Ms. Nadia Murad, who was here with us this morning, and I commend her courage. She is a voice for many survivors, not just in Iraq but throughout the world. I would like also to thank Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and all those civil-society representatives who briefed us this morning.

During the period 2014-2017, the entire world witnessed the perpetration of the most horrific crimes by the Da'esh terrorist organization against the Iraqi people, including decapitations, the sexual slavery of women and girls, forced marriage, the destruction of religious heritage and blatant disdain for the very principles of human rights and human dignity. Those crimes constitute genocide and crimes against humanity. Today, in the wake of that terrible legacy, Iraq is sparing no effort to promote peace, bring justice to the victims and provide reparations to the survivors pursuant to our national legislation and our international commitments.

In March 2021, the Iraqi Parliament adopted a law on Yazidi female survivors, the first law to offer compensation and support to survivors, including

women and girls who were sexually enslaved and sold in slave markets. They were forced to change their religion and get married. They were forced to become pregnant and to have abortions. That law also stipulates that a search will be undertaken for abducted persons. Pursuant to that law, a General Directorate for Female Survivors' Affairs has been set up, which is the main body charged with implementing the law. This law explicitly states that the crimes perpetrated by the Da'esh terrorist organization constitute crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity. No general amnesty or specific amnesty can be granted to the perpetrators of crimes of abduction and captivity.

The Council of Ministers, furthermore, has adopted legislation aimed at implementing the law of female survivors, taking into account their needs and hearing their views. It promotes peaceful coexistence and rejects violence. The Council of Ministers is planning to open medical centres to provide psychosocial and societal services to the survivors. Paragraph 6 of the law stipulates that applications presented by the survivors to the centres need to be confidential. In order to facilitate the process of submitting the applications, the Directorate is developing a mechanism for receiving and reviewing them and is establishing a database. The Directorate also plans to set up an online platform to receive applications in electronic format.

With regard to the idea of appointing a special envoy, we believe that the United Nations is already broadly represented in Iraq by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, which provides political advice and humanitarian and development assistance. In addition, the Federal Government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government hold high-level meetings to deal with all issues, including coordination between Iraqi security forces and Peshmerga forces to combat the remaining Da'esh cells.

Members of Da'esh are still appearing before our national courts to answer for the crimes and atrocities committed against the Iraqi people, pursuant to Iraq's commitment to achieving accountability and justice for all victims, including those of sexual violence, which cannot be tolerated.

The Government is also strengthening the powers of judges in the areas of combating terrorism and promoting our judicial system in line with the Iraqi Constitution and Iraq's international obligations. Iraq is prepared to receive the evidence that has been gathered

by the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) in order to use it in a competent national court.

The Council of Representatives of Iraq has finished its first reading of a draft law concerning the criminal court, which will address the crimes committed by elements of Da'esh. That is the first step towards ensuring accountability and fairness for all survivors and using the evidence collected by UNITAD before an Iraqi court.

In conclusion, with the support of civil society organizations, the Directorate continues to play a vital role in supporting the female survivors of sexual violence and addressing the stigmatization inflicted upon them through awareness-raising and encouraging them to submit applications so that they may benefit from reparations measures pursuant to the law concerning female Yezidi survivors.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Khandamishvili (Georgia): I wish to extend our appreciation to the United Kingdom presidency for convening today's debate. We thank the briefers for their comprehensive, insightful and powerful presentations.

Georgia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and I would like to make some additional comments in my national capacity.

Today we are speaking about a cruel tactic of war and horrific crime — sexual violence in conflict — which is alarmingly widespread in conflicts and military confrontations worldwide. Impunity for those crimes continues to prevail and justice has yet to be served for the victims and survivors. The international community can and must do more to investigate, prosecute and hold perpetrators accountable. That is vital for the future prevention of such heinous crimes.

In that regard, let me reiterate our full support and solidarity for Ukraine. Georgia strongly condemns Russia's unjustified and unprovoked full-scale military aggression against its sovereign neighbour, which has brought devastating humanitarian consequences and immense suffering to Ukrainians.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable. They have fallen victim to attacks on civilians and

civilian infrastructure, including on maternity hospitals and other health-care facilities, schools and shelters. Equally disturbing are reports about Russian forces perpetrating sexual violence and rape as a weapon of war against women and girls.

In that regard, we once again stress the urgency of a prompt and impartial investigation into all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and related crimes. As I mentioned, ensuring accountability for perpetrators and justice for survivors is key to the prevention and deterrence of future violence of this nature.

The adoption of Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security paves the way for States to establish a firm normative framework to address conflict-related sexual violence as an issue of peace and security. Georgia pays particular attention to those resolutions and has been carrying out its national action plans for their implementation since 2012.

The promotion of women's rights and gender equality, including in the military, is a high priority for Georgia. The Ministry of Defence has developed its gender equality strategy, which establishes the conditions to promote equal rights and opportunities for men and women, prevent and eradicate all forms of discrimination, counter gender violence and eliminate misconduct, sexual harassment and physical and psychological mistreatment.

Georgia makes every effort to build the capacity of peacekeeping personnel to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in both conflict and post-conflict situations. Peacekeeping personnel are trained according to Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security within the framework of mandatory predeployment training. Georgia spares no effort to maintain issues related to women victims of conflict, including refugees, on the agenda of the Geneva international discussions, which is the only format for negotiations between Georgia and Russia on security and humanitarian issues.

Georgian participants in the Geneva discussions hold regular meetings with civil society, internally displaced persons and women affected by the conflict, as well as women's rights groups, to exchange information on peace talks and set the needs and priorities of conflict-affected women and vulnerable groups. Our commitment to address sexual violence in conflict has been further strengthened by endorsing

important multilateral initiatives, such as the Safe Schools Declaration.

Regrettably, the illegal occupation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and of Tskhinvali in South Ossetia by the Russian Federation remains the main obstacle for the Government of Georgia to implementing the human rights protection framework for the women and girls residing in the Russian-occupied territories of Georgia.

They remain particularly vulnerable, as their fundamental rights and freedoms are frequently neglected and violated, including but not limited to freedom of movement and illegal detentions by Russian occupying forces. International engagement and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms inside the conflict-affected regions is of paramount importance to protect the rights of women and girls, including with respect to the prevention of sexual violence.

The President: I give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Monsignor Murphy: (Holy See): The Holy See is grateful to the United Kingdom presidency for having convoked this open debate on accountability as prevention and ending cycles of sexual violence in conflict and for being given the floor to offer a few considerations.

Sexual violence in conflict is now widely recognized by the international community as a war crime. Year after year, the reports of the Secretary-General confirm that it has taken its place among the horrors of all violent conflicts. Sexual violence is often used as a cruel tactic of war in order to advance strategic objectives to subjugate and humiliate victims, causing them physical, emotional and psychological harm, and has profoundly negative impacts on the communities to which victims belong, as a result of which they sometimes find themselves ostracized.

Despite increasing attention to this war crime, sexual violence in conflict often remains hidden, underreported and given little attention compared to its scope both during conflict and after the end of hostilities — a period that often remains chaotic, lawless and dangerous.

In that regard, ensuring as accurate reporting as possible should contribute both to present a more precise picture of how widespread such inhumane crimes are and to take the necessary steps so that victims may receive adequate assistance and support.

In this field, grass-roots and civil society organizations also play an important role while striving — often in situations of great danger — to help victims of sexual violence in conflict.

In addition to being a hidden crime, sexual violence in conflict is sadly also a crime ignored that is perceived to be less attention-worthy or, alarmingly, is viewed as intrinsic to conflict and therefore a fixed feature of it. What is more, impunity is often the norm and consequently victims are often afraid to speak out. The silence must be broken. Impunity must give way to accountability so that there can be justice and reparation. The lack of concerted efforts to ensure justice compounds the suffering of victims, who are often marginalized and left on their own to deal with trauma and pain. Holding perpetrators accountable is also a key factor in deterring and preventing such acts.

The Holy See welcomes the work done at the international level through legal action and investigation, as well as advocacy in the pursuit of justice to end impunity. In particular, we commend Ms. Nadia Murad's courage and her dedication in bringing her weighty voice to those efforts. Survivors should not only be heard; their pain should be acknowledged, their strength recognized and their wisdom harnessed to promote and protect the human dignity and rights of all.

In situations of conflict and tension around the world, we must never forget that women are not only victims but also have an essential and irreplaceable role as protagonists in the promotion of peace and reconciliation at the local, national and international levels. To exclude the full participation of women at every stage and aspect of peace processes would be to fail the commitments made since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000).

Common multilateral action is absolutely needed to effectively address the scourge of sexual violence in conflict. The Holy See encourages, in a particular way, the members of the Security Council to seek concrete and unifying action, in collaboration with the Secretariat, as well as to promote initiatives to prevent and combat sexual abuse in United Nations peacekeeping operations, including through the specialized training of personnel, with the specific aim of reducing risks in host countries.

The Holy See hopes that today's open debate and the attention it brings to the subject will give more space to survivors and victims to encourage them to

come forward to find healing and hope, through the recognition of their personal dignity, and will see the establishment of more robust mechanisms to bring those who have committed violations against them to justice.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Ms. Chan Valverde (Costa Rica): Costa Rica thanks the United Kingdom for convening today's open debate and its leadership on this issue. Sexual violence is not an inevitable consequence of conflicts and States are called upon to prevent, investigate and punish it. In that regard, allow me to make the following remarks.

First, Costa Rica deplors the fact that impunity for sexual violence in armed conflict remains the norm; that justice continues to elude victims; and that accountability is the exception, not the rule — from Ethiopia to Myanmar to Ukraine. To put an end to impunity, all State and non-State actors involved in atrocities must be held accountable. That work begins at home, with the adoption of robust legislation and by strengthening judicial institutions and guaranteeing victims and survivors access to justice and the right to full reparation.

The International Criminal Court plays a fundamental role in that regard. Costa Rica urges the Court to continue to promote the implementation of the Rome Statute by adopting an intersectional approach in all proceedings involving sexual violence in armed conflict.

Secondly, Costa Rica firmly believes in changing the reductionist binary lens through which sexual violence in armed conflict has been addressed for far too long. For a long time, boys and men and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people have been excluded from discussions on this topic. Costa Rica calls upon the Council to broaden the conversation so that all victims are considered. A victim-centred approach and gender mainstreaming are key to ensuring more inclusive and effective accountability. Invisibility perpetuates injustice and underpins impunity.

Thirdly, Costa Rica believes that the international response to conflict-related sexual violence must be more forceful and should match the achievements made other areas, such as the protection of civilians. Sexual violence in conflict is not a second-rate issue. It is an indisputable priority of the international community,

which Costa Rica believes should be systematically reflected in the Council's reports and actions.

While Costa Rica acknowledges the delay in adopting a feminist approach to international criminal law, we highlight the crucial contribution of Costa Rican Judge Elizabeth Odio Benito. In 1998, as a judge at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Elizabeth Odio Benito worked tirelessly to ensure that rape and sexual assault of other kinds were viewed as forms of torture.

Her interpretation is now an accepted principle of international law and represents a milestone in the struggle to condemn the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. It is time to honour that historic debt to women and to all victims and survivors — all of them, without exception and without distinction — because we all deserve to live with greater dignity under the sun.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of NATO.

Mr. Miarka (NATO): Let me thank the United Kingdom for convening this important debate. It is particularly timely, considering the reports of the horrific acts of sexual violence perpetrated against women and children in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Using sexual violence as a tactic of war is a gross violation of human rights.

For a decade, starting with the Chicago Summit in 2012, NATO has continued to demonstrate its commitment to preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. In 2015, we developed specific military guidelines on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, which provide strategic direction with the aim of reducing risk and improving responsive measures for the protection of vulnerable populations.

NATO personnel are obliged to prevent, act and stop sexual violence in areas where it operates; develop the analytical tools necessary to understand the level of risk of sexual violence for information collection and reporting; and cooperate with relevant local and international actors, including the United Nations.

Last year, allies approved the NATO policy on conflict-related violence, which outlines the actions that NATO will take to prevent and respond to sexual violence in all operations, missions and Council-mandated activities.

NATO's dedication to prevent and combat any form of sexual violence is far-reaching. We have been working with the United Nations to integrate it into our education and training to ensure that our staff are fully prepared. We work with partners, such as the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations, to ensure that gender advisers and gender focal points are well equipped before deployment.

NATO also participates in the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict to join the United Nations and our other partners in raising awareness. We continue to amplify that through other activities, both on the military and civilian sides.

In particular, NATO Secretary-General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, Irene Fellin, works closely with the Civil Society Advisory Panel, an independent coalition of women's rights experts aimed at assisting NATO in the effective implementation of the women and peace and security mandate across the alliance. That helps ensure that the actions we take are built upon the insight gained from the perspectives of women civil society members from allies, partners and conflict-affected areas. That has assisted us both in our policymaking and in identifying early warning indicators to support our efforts for the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence.

Integrity is one of the guiding principles in NATO's approach to women and peace and security. With integrity comes accountability. When conflict-related sexual violence cannot be prevented, those who engage in it must be brought to justice. NATO is working to make conflict-related sexual violence a part of its work on battlefield evidence collection to ensure that war criminals are held accountable.

Such efforts are not only a part of what we do, but of who we are. NATO will continue to work towards preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence, as well as holding those responsible accountable. We will continue to work with the United Nations and other partners in this important area, which has a devastating effect on not only women, girls and boys, but also entire communities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cyprus.

Mr. Hadjichrysanthou (Cyprus): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this important debate. My statement complements that of the

European Union, to which we fully subscribe. I thank the Special Representative for her report (S/2022/272), and applaud the briefers for their courageous and compelling interventions.

Sexual violence as a weapon of war cannot be considered as an inevitable consequence of armed conflicts, even though the history of that disturbing phenomenon is as long as that of war itself. Despite the increased attention to the women and peace and security agenda, we observe that significant gaps remain in effectively addressing the phenomenon.

Strategies to address sexual violence in conflict have mainly focused on perpetrator accountability and survivor support after violence has already occurred. While those are vital, we also need to establish solid prevention measures to stop sexual violence from occurring in the first place. Conflict-related sexual violence is preventable by systematic action.

Placing prevention at the core of our approach requires a multifaceted, multi-level and multidimensional strategy that includes addressing the root causes of conflict itself. Investing in strengthening the rule of law and State institutions and in economic stability, infrastructure and social development, as well as addressing deep-rooted inequalities and ensuring women's participation in all spheres, are central to that approach. At the same time, foundational to a preventive approach would be the recognition of the importance of two particular aspects.

The first aspect is the continuum of sexual violence. While conflict-related sexual violence takes place in conflict settings, it still occurs within the broader context of gender-based violence and exists within a global climate of impunity, where gender inequality and women's disempowerment play a highly significant role in its perpetuation.

The second aspect is the primacy of survivors. Survivors should not be a voice alone. They must become the architects of strategies aimed at addressing conflict-related sexual violence. A survivor-centred approach cannot focus solely on providing support or promoting women's empowerment. It must also address the economic, social and political structures that underpin their disempowerment.

Post-conflict situations provide an opportunity for the transformation of societal structures in ways that ensure greater enjoyment of women's human rights. Yet

women continue to be excluded from conflict prevention efforts, post-conflict transitions and reconstruction processes. Post-conflict societies recover and rebuild more effectively when women participate in reconstruction efforts and their experiences in conflict are addressed. Responding to conflict-related sexual violence should include women in developing solutions to the factors that place them at risk.

History, including in the case of Cyprus, has shown that the role of women in conflict resolution, post-conflict rehabilitation, reconciliation and sustainable peace is key. At the same time, the violence and degradation suffered by women in conflict situations remain largely unaddressed. As a country that has experienced the atrocity of conflict-related sexual violence first hand, Cyprus attaches great importance to the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence and joins calls to accelerate efforts towards their elimination.

The crucial role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and the need for their full, equal and meaningful participation and involvement in all efforts for the maintenance of peace and security have been widely recognized, particularly by the Organization. What remains is for that to be translated into practice. Sexual violence in conflict is a grave human rights violation, which constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Curbing the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence is therefore not only a moral but also a strategic imperative.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Turay (Sierra Leone): The delegation of Sierra Leone is pleased to join the global discourse on accountability as prevention: ending cycles of sexual violence in conflict. I congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April, and I thank you for convening this timely debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his recent insightful report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2022/272).

Having experienced one of the bloodiest and fiercest civil wars, during which sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, et cetera were used as tactics of war by the warring factions, Sierra Leone is fully aware of the horrifying impact of such crimes on the lives and livelihoods of its

women and girls and is sparing no efforts in combating that scourge.

On the domestic front, in recent times we have taken many bold steps to address the incidence of sexual violence. From amending our national law on sexual violence to setting up a special court on rape, as well as establishing a one-stop centre to provide services for survivors of sexual abuse, we continue to demonstrate an exemplary commitment to combating the incidence of sexual violence within our borders.

Building on our domestic efforts, in his address at the General Assembly in September 2021 (see A/76/PV.6), His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone called for global solidarity with regard to access to justice and remedies for survivors of sexual violence in the form of a stand-alone resolution, to be adopted by the Assembly hopefully during this seventy-sixth session. The resolution will not only highlight the gravity of sexual violence, but will specifically call out the crime as abhorrent to international peace and security and will uplift survivors as deserving dignity and justice. I therefore avail myself of this opportunity to encourage all Member States to support that noble initiative when the times comes, as most of its elements speak to the issue of accountability as prevention. In our view, peace is not the absence of visible conflict and, in order to have true peace, survivors must have access to justice.

It is no gainsaying that many commendable actions have been taken by both the General Assembly and the Security Council in the form of treaties, conventions and resolutions, including resolution 1820 (2008). Yet women and children around the world remain vulnerable to sexual violence, be it in times of war or peace. There is still much to be done at the national, subregional, regional and global levels if we are to fully implement landmark resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) and other related human rights instruments in our grand effort to turn the tide against sexual violence in all its forms and manifestations.

Let me close by encouraging delegations present in this Chamber to deeply reflect upon the fact that, notwithstanding the many strong measures adopted individually and collectively, the despicable crime of sexual violence has continued unabated around the globe, and often with total impunity. The time is now to accelerate efforts aimed at taking concerted and concrete steps to address incidents of sexual violence

crimes, restoring the dignity of survivors by promoting forward-looking strategies, and strengthening accountability as prevention through enforcing compliance with the relevant normative positions that we have all adopted.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Koba (Indonesia): I would like to thank the United Kingdom delegation for convening today's meeting. We also thank all the briefers for their briefings.

Sexual violence should never be used as a weapon in conflict. Based on the reports we have heard, it is important to make sure the use of sexual violence must stop. This is the first step to fulfilling our commitment to saving lives. Indonesia supports the United Nations in its multifaceted efforts aimed at ending the cycles of sexual violence in conflict.

We must support nationally developed, home-grown and reliable justice and accountability capacities. We believe that there is no immediate way to fight and end impunity to sexual violence in conflict. Every effort to end sexual violence, especially in conflict settings, must be built based on strong national and local willingness and ownership.

Just yesterday, the Government of Indonesia enacted its law on the protection of women and girls against sexual violence. However, for Indonesia, this understanding has guided us for a long time. In 2014, reflecting the highest political commitment of the country, a presidential regulation was signed to provide instruction on the protection of women and children in conflict situations. This regulation came at a moment when the global community had been struck by the increasing reports of sexual violence in conflicts, especially since the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. In less than a year, ministerial guidance was also published to ensure the implementation of the presidential regulation at the national and subnational levels.

Focus on women's participation is crucial. As we progress in discussions on the women and peace and security agenda, we are also faced with many challenges to women's equal participation, including in the peacekeeping missions. Today, four United Nations peacekeeping missions have specific mandates to help address sexual violence in countries with conflicts.

However, the representation of female peacekeepers in those missions remains low. From the reports of the Secretary-General, we can see that the number of female peacekeepers and the numbers of sexual-violence cases in the missions are inversely proportional. We call on the Security Council to pay attention to this trend, taking into consideration the linkage and connectivity between the presence of female peacekeepers and the number of sexual-violence offences.

Lastly, international cooperation plays an important role in strengthening States' capacities in ensuring accountability and justice for sexual violence in conflict situations. In this regard, Indonesia stands ready to support efforts aimed at building the capacities of States, especially through triangular or South-South cooperation. Innovative financing, including through the Bretton Woods system, and regional cooperation are also important avenues to be explored.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Hossain (Bangladesh): I thank the United Kingdom presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's important open debate. I also express my sincere appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pramila Patten, Nobel Laureate Ms. Nadia Murad and the other briefers for their comprehensive remarks.

We take note of the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2022/272) pointing out that intersecting humanitarian, security and political crises further exacerbated the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence in 2021. We are also concerned by the report's findings that compliance by conflict parties with relevant international norms and resolutions remains appallingly low. Against this backdrop, today's debate on accountability as a preventive measure to end the cycles of sexual violence in conflict is very timely. We stress that the international community should make further efforts to implement the Secretary-General's earlier calls for translating commitments and resolutions into tangible results.

Bangladesh had its own horrific experience of sexual violence in conflict during its war of liberation in 1971, when over 200,000 women were violated. Despite numerous challenges in rebuilding a war-ravaged country, we took measures for their rehabilitation immediately after our independence. The perpetrators

were brought to justice through a trial process, and the contribution of victims was officially recognized.

Our own experience has also inspired us to host over a million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals, the Rohingyas, a large majority of whom are women and girls, and to provide them with critical support, including reproductive-health support. Unfortunately, there has been no progress yet in ensuring accountability of the perpetrators in Myanmar of the crimes committed against the Rohingya women. Without the perpetrators being held accountable, the desired environment conducive to return cannot be created in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

Our commitments to eliminating sexual violence in conflict have been duly reflected through our contribution to peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities. We have increased the number of female peacekeepers in various peacekeeping missions, and we have also sent female judges to conflict-prone zones to strengthen the judicial sector of host countries. Our national action plan on women, peace and security recommends specific activities for updating and localizing modules and training materials for peacekeepers in the implementation of related mandates.

Allow me to highlight a few points on preventive measures against sexual violence in conflict. First, creating a culture of accountability should be the utmost priority in preventing future incidents. Leaving the perpetrators unaccountable would encourage repetition of the same crimes. In this regard, the security and justice sectors of conflict-affected countries need to be strengthened. We call for increased international support for capacity-building in this regard.

Secondly, early warning of possible violence can play a significant role in preventing violence. However, credible data in this regard are often missing. The collection, analysis and preservation of real-time data on sexual violence in armed conflicts are important to ensuring the efficacy of specific preventive measures, such as early-warning mechanisms.

Thirdly, the participation of women in all stages of peace processes must be ensured. In this regard, we welcome the proposals of the Secretary-General articulated in his report *Our Common Agenda*, inter alia, to put women and girls at the centre of security policy and to bolster their economic inclusion, .

Fourthly, adoption and implementation of national action plans on women, peace and security can play an instrumental role in preventing sexual violence in conflict. While we have seen the adoption of national action plans on women, peace and security in many countries in recent years, 95 States Members of the United Nations have yet to adopt one. We stress the importance of universalizing national action plans to advance gender equality so as to address the deeper causes of conflict-related sexual violence.

Fifthly, the Peacebuilding Commission has a critical role to play in supporting national efforts aimed at promoting gender equality, women's empowerment and elimination of all forms of violence against women and discrimination on the basis of sex in conflict-affected countries. These will add value to the overall preventive measures.

Finally, we stress the importance of adopting a survivor-centred approach in the response to conflict-related sexual violence. In this regard, we appreciate the role and activities of the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network in meeting the needs of survivors. Coherence and cooperation among the stakeholders should be strengthened to ensure that services are delivered in accordance with the fundamental principle of the United Nations Action network — delivering as one.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Pieris (Sri Lanka): Sri Lanka appreciates the United Kingdom's role in supporting the discussion on the women and peace and the security agenda, which has featured prominently in the recent debates. The importance of highlighting the risks that women and girls face during conflict is particularly important in today's environment, in which women and girls are surely marginalized.

The Security Council's recognition of sexual violence as a tactic of war in resolution 1820 (2008) was a milestone in recognizing how conflict impacts women. The bounds within which sexual violence in a conflict occurs are not constrained to the battlefield. It occurs in refugee camps, at the hands of non-State actors, military personnel, spouses or those designated to protect womenkind. It includes the sexual exploitation of children, pornography and sexual assault, and so on. Victims of abuse are often abandoned, leaving children

with no one to care for them, and receive little to no societal support.

When the avenues for abuse in conflict are so rife and the threat so ever-present, it is pertinent to ask how the international community can make tangible decisions with regard to the issue of accountability. In order to address the issue, we need to make a global and concerted effort to shift conflict-associated sexual violence from a secondary concern to a primary one. All Member States need adequate training and better research and policy programme-sharing, in which intervention techniques addressing sexual violence in peacebuilding efforts are better understood and more accessible.

We recall the bold step taken by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2004, when he appointed Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein of Jordan to help form a comprehensive strategy to eliminate future sexual exploitation and abuse within our peacekeeping forces.

Another discernible feature of note is the hypermasculine culture that exists and that seems to encourage exploitation and abuse, as the majority of personnel engaged in armed conflict are men. Such behaviour has been dismissed in the past thanks to a "men will be men" attitude. That forms a bond of misplaced camaraderie that helps protect the reputation of the offender but also results in the stigmatization of the complainant — the final result being that instances of sexual abuse are swept under the carpet.

We must train our personnel investigating crimes of sexual violence to develop keen investigation skills. Investigators must maintain the highest level of integrity and probity, without fear or favour. In addition to intensive training, we must focus on community outreach and engage in the education of women, children and vulnerable groups on gender-based violence and remedies.

We must bridge the gap in addressing the canvas of sexual offences: we cannot hold only rape and sex trafficking to a higher degree of accountability while allowing the offenders of domestic abuse and mental harassment to enjoy impunity. That creates a hierarchy whereby certain violations can be considered the order of the day or acceptable.

It has also been observed that in these uncertain times, parties involved in armed conflict have adopted

a new *modus operandi*. It appears that engaging in the traditional contours of the battlefield is no longer the style of aggression. Instead, attacks on the cradle of our civilization — our educational institutions — have been the launching pads for aggression. Parties to armed conflict have begun to use educational facilities as bases, barracks, detention centres and weapon storage units.

That *modus operandi* lends itself to the use of educational facilities, which increases the risk of child soldiers being recruited. In Sri Lanka, non-State actors recruited 594 child soldiers, who were exploited in multifarious forms, but were mercifully taken into welfare camps, rehabilitated and returned to their parents.

To combat that atrocity and stop it, Member States must ensure that the foundational elements of school safety are prevalent; ensure that schools are possessed of characteristics that are safe and responsive to all contingencies in conflict; and ensure that infrastructure, crisis communication, geography and procedures — the four security factors — are established in schools in conflict areas. We also call upon Member States to help prevent the use of school premises for the launching of military operations.

It is time for us to firmly pledge to take every possible step to eliminate the occurrence of sexual violence in armed conflict and in the resolution of disputes between Member States and to establish an institutional mechanism based on dialogue and diplomacy.

The President: As we still have a number of names inscribed on the list of speakers for tonight, I would once again like to remind all representatives to keep their statements to no more than four minutes.

I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting, which deals with many issues, including ending the cycles of sexual violence in conflict situation.

In the Republic of Yemen, women enjoy a high social standing. Our customs and traditions, as well as our national laws, prohibit any physical attacks against women and any violations of their dignity. However, such violations have assumed a significant dimension during the historic conflict in Yemen today, due to the unprecedented attacks against women and children perpetrated by the terrorist Houthi militias.

Since 2014, women have been subjected to a number of violations linked to armed conflict at the hands of the terrorist Houthi militias, which have violated all Yemeni customs and traditions, as well as the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Such violations, to name a few, have included kidnapping and disappearing women activists, preventing them from practicing their right to speech and demonstration, fabricating malicious accusations against them and subjecting them to mock trials.

The Security Council Panel of Experts on Yemen documented some of the crimes perpetrated by those militias against women and girls, such as arbitrary arrest and sexual aggression at the Houthi detention centres in Sana'a. The Security Council, in its resolution 2564 (2021), included the leader of the Houthi militia, Sultan Saleh Aida Zabin, in the sanctions list, clarifying that the related sanctions had been imposed as a result of the role played by him in implementing a policy of intimidation and the use of systematic arrest, detention, torture, sexual violence and rape against politically active women. The Yemeni Government welcomed the resolution, which brings some justice to Yemeni women in areas under the control of the Houthi terrorist militias.

The Yemeni Government has put in place an action plan to respond to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. That action plan, which was established by representatives of various stakeholders, focuses on increasing the participation of women in the legislative, executive and judicial sectors, as well as in the security forces, the army and the local and international mechanisms, in order to monitor the implementation of international conventions, address conflicts and maintain peace; establishing early warning mechanisms that take into account women's increased participation in preventing violence and extremism; implementing laws, rehabilitating police and military forces to prevent violence against women; providing health, psychological and legal support to women and girls who are victims of violations and violence; establishing guidelines for service providers, while implementing programmes to empower women in times of conflict and beyond; providing girls with education and establishing rehabilitation centres for women and girls that have been subjected to violence; and meeting the needs of vulnerable women and girls who are refugees and displaced victims of violence, while ensuring the participation of women in disarmament plans, the

provision of humanitarian assistance and implementing programmes in hosting communities.

The Republic of Yemen has ratified a number of international agreements and conventions, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in order to ensure the protection of women in conflict situations, while also strengthening their role in preventing conflict and building peace.

The Yemeni Government has supported the efforts of the Independent National Commission of Inquiry to investigate allegations of violations of human rights throughout the Yemeni territories, pursuant to the State decision which established the Commission. Its mandate is to investigate cases and transfer violations to the judiciary and initiate prosecution against violators. The ninth report of the Commission looked into 40 types of violations against women, the latest of which was the kidnapping and arbitrary detention by the terrorist Houthi militias of citizen Intisar Hammdi and others, while subjecting them to unjust trial upon false and unlawful allegations and sentencing them to prison terms.

In conclusion, the Yemeni Government once again reaffirms our firm commitment to the protection of women and the prevention of violations against them, especially amid the ongoing conflict. We call on the international community to support our national efforts to address the challenges confronting the Yemeni women, especially in areas under the control of the Houthi militias and to protect women so as to enjoy their rights ensured by Yemeni and international laws.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Latvia.

Mr. Pildegovičs (Latvia): Latvia thanks the United Kingdom presidency of the Council for hosting this timely and pertinent debate and aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and its member States and the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016), which underline the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war in conflicts around the world.

Please allow me to focus on the crimes perpetrated by Russia in Ukraine.

Latvia strongly condemns the atrocities and grave violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law by the Russian

Federation. Brutal Russian aggression, enabled by Belarus, on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including maternity hospitals and other health-care facilities, schools and shelters, that has killed and gravely injured civilians, including pregnant women and newborns, have left the world reeling. The recent attack on Kramatorsk train station mainly killed women, children and elderly persons looking for safety.

Latvia condemns in the strongest terms the atrocities surfacing from Bucha, the liberated areas around Kyiv and other regions, including rape and sexual violence against women and girls, perpetrated by the Russian armed forces. We are increasingly hearing stories of rape and sexual violence used as a weapon of war by the Russian armed forces. The Council has determined that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide. For all atrocity crimes, Russia must and will be held accountable.

In that regard, Latvia has initiated national criminal legal procedures to gather evidence on crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes against peace perpetrated by the Russian military. Latvia has also decided to provide an additional financial contribution of €100,000 to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to support it in the investigation of crimes perpetrated in Ukraine. Latvia welcomes criminal proceedings initiated against Russian military at the national level in other countries. Latvia also welcomes the support countries have shown to the ICC and encourages the member States of the Rome Statute that have not yet done so, to act likewise.

The Security Council has a specific responsibility to take timely and decisive action in order to protect populations by preventing atrocity crimes. In practice, however, the deliberations of the Council often fail to generate solutions, including in situations where atrocity crimes are already being committed. The expectation of the international community that the Council will take timely and decisive action to protect populations from atrocity crimes has therefore not yet been fulfilled. As a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) group, Latvia is of the view that it is necessary to maximize the Security Council's efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability. We encourage Member States that have not done so to join the code of conduct elaborated by the ACT group regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes,

as well as the Political Declaration on Suspension of Veto Powers in Cases of Mass Atrocity. It is also important to strengthen synergies between the Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council to comprehensively strengthen the protection of human rights and the prevention of sexual violence.

Latvia reiterates the importance of the full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and its follow-up resolutions, in particular resolutions 2106 (2013) and 2467 (2019) and their provisions regarding accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, as well as services to the survivors. Latvia calls on all relevant United Nations mechanisms, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to maintain their focus on the situation of civilians affected by the Russian aggression in Ukraine. Latvia continues to support the work of these mechanisms, as well as directly support those caught in the war in Ukraine.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Almoslechner (Austria): Austria aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union (EU) and the Group of Friends on Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016).

We commend the United Kingdom for its efforts to organize the annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence, with a special focus on accountability as prevention. We thank the briefers for their insights and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten for presenting the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272), which paints a bleak picture of the consequences of conflict-related sexual violence in relation to unwanted pregnancies of women and girls as a result of rape in conflicts.

Austria strongly condemns all form of sexual and gender-based violence committed in armed conflicts. We urge all responsible parties to stop this heinous crime, and we stand in full solidarity with all victims and their families.

It is each State's responsibility to ensure accountability and access to justice for victims of conflict-related sexual violence. In accordance with resolution 2467 (2019), Member States have the obligation to apply a survivor-centred approach and focus on access to medical and psychosocial care.

We welcome some modest positive trends in certain countries, as identified in the Secretary-General's report, but we remain deeply concerned that not enough action is being taken on the ground in relationship to assisting victims and, in particular, women and girls who gave birth as a result of conflict-related rape.

In our view, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is the most effective and relevant international instrument to assist Member States in establishing accountability and ending impunity. In that context, we welcome the action of the ICC in relation to the first international conviction on a charge of forced pregnancy in February 2021.

We urge the members of the Security Council to take bolder action and not shy away in order to address conflict-related sexual violence in all country-specific situations and to apply the sanction regime to any perpetrators in that respect.

Austria also recognizes that the crime of conflict-related sexual violence also affects men and boys and persons with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, which must not be forgotten. Austria is proud to support its national human rights institute — the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights — which currently works with the Princeton University Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination and other partners on a study on the nexus between conflict-related sexual violence against men, boys and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons and human trafficking. We invite all interested delegations to assist in the release of this study here in New York on 9 May during an expert seminar at our Permanent Mission.

Austria remains a strong supporter of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten, as well as UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund in its efforts to address the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence. We applaud the Special Representative's efforts in working with conflict-affected Member States and armed groups in order to address the situation of victims. Furthermore, Austria continues to support the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

Let me briefly mention two country-specific situations.

Together with EU member States and in close coordination with the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF, as well as other United Nations agencies, Austria will continue to support dedicated efforts to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe of the Ukrainian people caused by the unprovoked and unjustified military aggression of the Russian Federation, which Austria strongly condemns. We repeat our call to the Russian Federation to immediately cease its military aggression and withdraw all its troops from Ukrainian territory and to respect its sovereignty in its internationally recognized borders. We echo other colleagues who have underlined that there will be no impunity for the Russian military and decision-makers who are responsible for the killings of civilians and sexual violence, including rape committed against women and girls in Ukraine.

Further, Austria closely follows the development of women's rights in Afghanistan and continues to support efforts by UN-Women and other United Nations agencies to protect women and girls from violence and contributing to their development, participation and empowerment.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nepal.

Mr. Rai (Nepal): I would like to begin by thanking the presidency of the United Kingdom for convening today's open debate on conflict-related sexual violence. I thank the briefers for their updates and valuable insights.

Nepal supports the normative framework of the Security Council for ending sexual violence in conflict. Conflict-related sexual violence is unforgivable, and the perpetrators of such crimes must therefore be held accountable.

It is the primary responsibility of the State to prevent violence against women. However, a State's ability is largely circumscribed by its level of socioeconomic development, legal and institutional framework, and commitment to the rule of law. Therefore, there is a need for strong international support to enable a Government to address the underlying causes of conflict and protect women and girls while bringing perpetrators to justice.

We must ensure the inclusion of women in State architecture, increase their participation at decision-making levels with regard to conflict prevention and resolution, implement gender-responsive sectoral reforms, and ensure the establishment of early-

warning and early-response systems in order to mitigate the risk of violence against women.

We believe that an enhanced level of participation by women in peacekeeping missions would greatly help protect women and girls from violence. As one of the largest troop- and police-contributing countries, Nepal is committed to increasing the number of women peacekeepers. Nepal is also committed to a zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, and is striving to maintain the goal of a zero-case scenario.

As a post-conflict country, Nepal has made significant efforts to ensure women's dignified representation in governance structures and has remained a proactive promoter of the women and peace and security agenda.

In 2011, Nepal was the first country in South Asia and the second in Asia to adopt a national action plan for the implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). Women's participation in decision-making, protecting women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, and ending impunity were among our topmost priorities in the national action plan. A second plan is being finalized that is advancing the women and peace and security agenda while addressing the concerns of victims of sexual violence, female combatants and children born of wartime rape.

Nepal is committed to resolving conflict-related sexual violence cases to ensure justice for victims. The process is led by two transitional justice commissions: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons. The Government is committed to providing the necessary support to those independent Commissions so that they can conclude a remaining yet vital part of Nepal's unique home-grown peace process while ensuring justice for victims and holding perpetrators accountable.

In conclusion, Nepal stresses the need for the inclusion and participation of women in governance architecture, conflict prevention, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction while emphasizing the necessity of addressing the underlying root causes of conflict with a view to bringing about enduring peace and prosperity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mrs. Mudrenko (Ukraine): Ukraine aligns itself with the statement delivered by the delegation of the European Union, and I wish to add some remarks in my national capacity.

At the outset, I would like to thank the United Kingdom presidency for having convened this timely and critically important debate. I would also like to express my gratitude to the briefers for their presentations.

The topic is more than relevant for my country given the recently reported acts of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian soldiers in Ukraine. It is a sad reality that women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and rape during wartime. The inhuman cruelty of the Russian invaders has turned the lives of millions of Ukrainian women and girls into horrific nightmares.

Reports of revealed facts and cases are piling up daily. Several hotlines have been opened in Ukraine for the survivors and witnesses of such crimes. La Strada-Ukraine manages one of those hotlines. On Monday the President of that non-governmental organization, Kateryna Cherepakha, briefed the Security Council (see S/PV.9013) about nine reported cases of rape by Russian soldiers in temporarily occupied towns and villages in the Kyivska, Khersonska and Chernigivska regions; 12 women and girls suffered in those attacks. Ukrainian officials are now talking about hundreds of such cases. However, they have been unable to assess the full scale of those atrocities. Many survivors remain in life-threatening situations, in territories that are under the control of Russian troops and cut off from help and connection.

Many victims are extremely traumatized; they are not ready to talk about what happened. They first require urgent care, especially medical and psychological, empathy, emotional support, respect for their personality and dignity, and recovery.

Regrettably, many were killed by Russian soldiers, who then tried to hide their crimes. Moreover, in some cases the bodies of the victims were burned. It speaks volumes that despite the extensive, credible and clear evidence, Russia continues to deny the obvious. We have not heard of any investigation launched by Russia. That can mean only that the atrocities committed by Russian soldiers against the civilian population in Ukraine, including sexual violence, were not perpetrators' excesses but a coordinated, systemic and sanctioned practice. The fact that female prisoners

of war have also been exposed to torture and sexual violence is additional proof of that assumption.

The sexual violence perpetrated by the Russian military in Ukraine also targets men and boys, although the vast majority of victims are women and girls.

All those crimes run counter to international law and Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence, for which States bear the primary responsibility.

Ukraine has called for an immediate, full and transparent investigation of all war crimes, including sexual violence. We commend in that regard the involvement of the relevant United Nations bodies, including the setting up of a United Nations Commission of Inquiry and the referral of the situation in Ukraine to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

We also welcome the initiative of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to enhance joint actions and programmes with the Government of Ukraine to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence and strengthen survivor-centred responses by supporting and reinforcing national mechanisms and institutions.

All war crimes, including the sexual violence committed by Russians in Ukraine, in particular in the liberated territories, are documented by the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, in cooperation with the national police and other pretrial investigation agencies and health-care facilities. Prosecutors and investigators are also cooperating closely with human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations that provide the women affected with medical and psychological support.

The truth will be established, and it is an important task for all of us, including the Security Council, to ensure that all responsible are brought to justice despite the attempts made to misuse the Council's permanent seat in order to escape responsibility.

The President: I thank the representative of Ukraine for her important words and contribution to this debate.

I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Vidal (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Chile wishes to thank the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom for having convened this open debate.

Our country aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security (see S/PV.9016) and of the LGBTQI Core Group.

At the outset, Chile expresses its rejection and condemnation of any and all acts of sexual abuse or exploitation in conflict situations or as a tactic of war. Likewise, it expresses its concern at the situation of the victims of sexual violence in conflict, since, as the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/272) indicates, sexual violence in conflict, including rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilization, forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence, as well as the impunity from which their perpetrators benefit, still prevail.

Such assaults on the integrity and human rights of the victims of those crimes, especially when they are used as a brutal tactic of war, have many devastating consequences for survivors and their families. Sexual violence in conflict is not only a reflection of the gender inequalities underlying it but also represents an additional obstacle to ending cycles of violence, in which the survivors of such abhorrent acts and their families must often cope with post-traumatic stress and social stigmatization, without any guarantee of access to justice or reparations.

The women and peace and security agenda clearly advocates for the full, equal, effective and meaningful participation of women in peace processes, conflict prevention and resolution, and peacebuilding. For Chile, there can be no participation without ensuring protection. The prevention of sexual and gender-based violence is therefore an integral part of the agenda. The peaceful resolution of conflicts entails addressing their root causes.

We see that cycles of violence are repeated when there is impunity. Accordingly, it is our duty to guarantee access to justice and comprehensive legal services for survivors, particularly women and girls, with accessible mechanisms that ensure confidentiality for victims so that they can report incidents of violence.

In addition, accountability mechanisms can serve as a strong deterrent to future acts of violence and must be put in place in a timely and functional manner. It is

imperative to hold perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence accountable in order to systemically combat the impunity that enables them to carry out such crimes without suffering any consequences for their actions.

Lastly, given the urgency of combating sexual violence in conflicts, we must move from aspirations to obligations and from commitments to their implementation. Accordingly, Chile fully supports the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in order to increase support for survivors and their inclusion. That is the only way to ensure their empowerment and their full, equal and meaningful participation in negotiations and peacebuilding processes and in peace and security decision-making at all levels.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Alateek (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my country's delegation would like to sincerely thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for convening this meeting today. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for her valuable briefing. We also thank Ms. Nadia Murad for her important briefing, as well as the other briefers.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemns sexual violence in all circumstances and situations, especially in conflict situations, which presents many challenges, including those related to access to legal and justice services. While we deplore all forms of sexual violence in conflict situations in the context of the resurgence of all kinds of crises throughout the world, my country stresses the need for the international community to work together in order to ensure fairness for victims, pursuant to the national laws of their countries and leading to full justice.

My country also believes in the importance of listening to the voice of women who live in vulnerable communities and meeting all their humanitarian needs, while involving them in developing and implementing humanitarian programmes, especially women affected by armed conflict, in order to devise plans that respond to their actual needs, particularly in emergency situations.

Our world is experiencing many rapid changes and successive and overlapping crises every day, which have added a new dimension to the negative repercussions

of the coronavirus disease pandemic in the health, economic and social contexts, with an evident impact on humanitarian work. Those challenges compel countries to put in place joint and comprehensive strategies for strengthening the role of women in responding to such crises and facilitating their access to essential services, particularly women who support their families, in order to enhance their capabilities and resilience.

Given the importance of the role of women in resilience and community-building, my country provides women with humanitarian support based on an approach that targets women and their needs in keeping with the findings of international reports on women and their needs in affected countries.

We also communicate with our partners in targeted countries to put in place humanitarian and relief programmes without discrimination, while focusing on alleviating the suffering of women and supporting them to lead a dignified life. Through the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Relief, my country has supported and enabled women at relief and humanitarian levels in areas affected by disasters and armed conflict.

We have implemented more than 788 projects in 79 regions throughout the world in the amount of more than \$520 million, which have benefited 109 million women. The projects have helped women to participate more in the economic field and workforce, advance their economic capacity-building and participate more in education and learning programmes in countries affected by armed conflict. Our support has included providing psychosocial and societal services, as well as providing female refugees with legal and protection services against the effects of violence.

My delegation notes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272), which covers the period from January to December 2021. We support the findings of the report concerning the phenomenon of terrorist and other armed groups that use sexual violence as a means to destabilize vulnerable societies. We stress that the illegal flow of small arms and light weapons contributes to fuelling sexual violence related to conflict on a large and systematic scale.

We would also like to highlight the violations and acts of sexual violence documented in the report and committed by the Houthi terrorist militias against women in regions under their control in Yemen. The report mentioned the horrors committed by the

Houthis, which is consistent with the approach adopted by that terrorist militia, including the perpetration of crimes against civilians in Yemen, especially women and children. We stress the importance of the necessary measures being taken by the Security Council to address sexual violence in conflict and punish its perpetrators.

The report of the Secretary-General sadly documented acts of sexual violence in conflict areas. The international community, especially donor countries, must make greater efforts to address crimes of sexual violence in conflict situations. We stress in that regard the dire need for the international community to coordinate among its humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities in order to ensure comprehensive and sustainable development, with the participation of women as a fundamental pillar.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, which is why we believe that States must strengthen preventive and proactive measures and enhance awareness-raising programmes in order to address the root causes of sexual violence in conflict situations. We also believe that promoting leadership roles of women in political, security and judiciary institutions will be an important step to that end.

Based on its international obligations and its support for all efforts to achieve international peace and security, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia implements the resolutions adopted by United Nations organs and mechanisms, including resolution 1325 (2000). Through our Vision 2030 initiative, we believe that women play an important role in society and we also believe in the importance of the equal participation of women with men and the need for women to fully participate in all efforts to maintain peace and security at all levels of decision-making.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ethiopia.

Mr. Yoseph (Ethiopia): My delegation requested the right to participate in today's open debate to provide some information on my country and briefly share the measures taken and mechanisms put in place to address crimes of sexual violence against women. There will be a special focus on the challenges we have faced since the treasonous attack against our National Defence Force on 4 November 2020. That attack brought about an unprecedented security challenge, which has seriously affected the lives and the overall well-being

of our people, especially those in Afar, Amhara and Tigray states.

During and after the adoption of law enforcement measures and by the time the aggression had expanded to the adjacent regions, women and children had fallen victim to the most atrocious forms of violations, which were systematically carried out by the Tigray's People's Liberation Front. The Government of Ethiopia takes all allegations on violations of human rights seriously and with a high level of responsibility and due diligence.

Accordingly, with regard to the allegations, in the aftermath of the November attack three layers of investigations have been established, including investigation by the Ethiopian Federal Police, the Joint Committee of Inquiry, the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, the Attorney General and the Minister of Defence, as well as investigation by regional police forces. In addition, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has published reports on alleged human rights violations that required the adoption of measures of accountability and redress.

Apart from its own investigations, on 24 March 2021 the Commission concluded an agreement with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to conduct joint investigations. The Government allowed full access, at the request of those two institutions, and when the investigation report was published in November last year, the Government, despite its reservations about the report, recognized it as an important input to measures of accountability and prevention.

All the investigation mechanisms I have mentioned unearthed substantial information on alleged violations. On the one hand, they disproved, by evidence, the accusations against the Ethiopian National Defence Force, including the systematic commission of sexual violence. On the other hand, they provided recommendations for accountability, redress and prevention. To date, 30 security officials have been charged, 10 of whom were convicted and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 10 to 25 years. An interministerial task force was also established to follow up the implementation of the accepted recommendations of the joint report.

Since June 2021, women and children in Afar and Amhara regions have endured unimaginable suffering and systematic sexual violence at the hands of the criminal group. On 11 March, the Ethiopian Human

Rights Commission published its investigation of those gross violations of rights, including mass murders and sexual violence. In addition, women in Tigray continue to experience violence, with no recourse for justice or redress. It should also be noted that close to 12,000 convicts and detainees were released from all prisons across the Tigray region by the criminal group, which has exacerbated the situation.

Nonetheless, we seek to reiterate the cardinal principle that Governments have the primary responsibility to ensure respect for and the protection and fulfilment of human rights. In that regard, the capacity of national enforcement and judicial institutions is indispensable for ensuring accountability and redress for human rights violations. Our experience has shown that national mechanisms are the most effective in reinstating justice. In that connection, we must emphasize the need to carefully approach conflict-related human rights violations. We have seen that human rights are politicized and used against countries like mine.

In the past 15 months, the level of hostility and vilification against Ethiopia has been driven not by human rights concerns but by a short-sighted and politically motivated agenda. We therefore call for extreme care and caution to ensure authenticity. The politicization of human rights, double standards and selectivity lead only to irreparable damage to the credibility of the international system and undermine collective efforts to promote and protect human rights.

We trust in the responsible approach of the members of the Council to make sure that the work of this principal organ does not undermine national efforts to address human rights concerns. It is also particularly important that no aspect of the Council's engagement interferes with the credibility of the work of other organs of the United Nations.

In conclusion, I would like to reassure the Council that Ethiopia maintains a zero-tolerance policy on sexual violence. No allegation will go unheard or uninvestigated or — when suspects are found guilty by due process of the law — unpunished. Under the criminal laws of Ethiopia, sexual violence is a crime with no statute of limitations. Such crimes are also not eligible for pardon or amnesty. Perpetrators are and will be held accountable and punished with the full force of the law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Ms. Eneström (Sweden): The LGBTI Core Group is honoured to present this statement to the Security Council on the occasion of this annual open debate on sexual violence in conflict.

At the outset, we would like to express full solidarity with women and girls, in all their diversity, living in conflict situations and other emergencies and crises. We know that women and girls, including lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons, are particularly negatively impacted by conflict. We stand in solidarity with all women and girls affected by the situation in Ukraine. We are also deeply shocked by the personal testimonies of rape and sexual violence that are now emerging.

The LGBTI Core Group recognizes the need to ensure that the work of the Security Council is inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of all individuals affected by conflict, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. In that respect, we thank the United Kingdom for chairing this important meeting. We pay tribute to all victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, including those who are victims of that kind of violence and discrimination, based on the real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression of sex characteristics.

The members of the United Nations LGBTI Core Group are deeply concerned about the fact that, despite the robust framework to prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence in conflict put in place by the Security Council over the past decade, the level of compliance by parties to conflict remains in most cases insufficient. The tools to address those most abhorrent violations are available to us. We must all redouble our efforts to see them implemented.

It is alarming and unacceptable that actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity can increase the chance of someone becoming the target of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilization, forced marriage and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence linked to conflict. We are concerned that the number of reports about such violations has increased in a number of conflicts.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned by the fact that the widespread underreporting of such crimes, retaliation, discrimination and stigmatization continue to be the norm in the case of conflict-related sexual violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity, thereby contributing to the widespread impunity for the perpetrators. Factors such as the criminalization of sexual orientation and gender identity, fear of stigmatization and reprisals, cultural norms, a lack of awareness, adequate support services and avenues for accountability for survivors particularly contribute to underreporting and must therefore be addressed.

In that regard, we call on all parties to conflicts to respect international law, including international humanitarian law, and human rights to break the vicious cycle of sexual violence, underreporting, impunity and retaliation, and provide targeted gender-sensitive services to address the needs of LGBTI victims and survivors of sexual violence, including access to justice, assistance, reparations and judicial redress. To that end, we welcome the role of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict and encourage it to take into consideration the special needs of victims and survivors who were targeted based on their real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics.

Therefore, the Core Group urges Member States to facilitate the full, equal and meaningful participation of LGBTI victims and survivors of sexual violence in the decision-making processes that affect them, including transitional justice strategies.

Likewise, the Core Group calls for the implementation of strategies to ensure access to comprehensive specialized services, including psychosocial health care and services, sexual and reproductive health services and legal and livelihood support and services, for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, adapted to their needs and provided without discrimination, as well as appropriate consideration to avoid discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression or sex characteristics and vulnerability to violence when adjudicating asylum claims.

Members should recognize that all survivors, including LGBTI persons, are unique individuals, with different experiences and needs, and that any support to assist and empower survivors must be

contextualized, paying particular attention to multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Bae (Republic of Korea): My delegation would like to commend the United Kingdom for convening today's important meeting.

At the outset, the Republic of Korea deplores the fact that the appalling situation in Ukraine as a result of Russia's aggression places women and girls at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence. The unfolding tragedy in Ukraine highlights the critical importance of the women and peace and security agenda. Against that backdrop, I would like to highlight the following four points.

First, a survivor-centred approach is required to address conflict-related sexual violence. We must ensure that survivors of sexual violence receive non-discriminatory access to all the services that they need. In accordance with the Action with Women and Peace initiative, the Republic of Korea has underscored the significance of the survivor-centred approach. At the third international conference on Action with Women and Peace, held in Seoul last November, we once again shed light on the need to strengthen women's role and leadership in building and sustaining peace through the survivor-centred approach.

Secondly, we must end the culture of impunity. Sexual violence continues to be exploited as a tactic of war, torture, terrorism and political repression in both conflict and post-conflict settings. The protection of survivors and witnesses from reprisals under an effective accountability mechanism is key to ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable. In that light, my delegation commends the work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict to assist rule-of-law institutions in enhancing accountability for conflict-related sexual violence.

Thirdly, we need to step up our efforts to tackle the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence. To that end, it is imperative to address structural gender inequality and to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls. Women and girls have been increasingly and systematically excluded from economic participation, public education and access to essential services in conflict-affected countries. My delegation deplores the Taliban's decision on 23 March not to reopen secondary

schools to Afghan girls, which contradicted its previous commitments. We highlight the fact that all Afghan citizens, including women and girls, deserve to have an equal right to education at all levels, and call on the Taliban to reverse that decision.

Last but not least, promoting women's participation in peacekeeping is essential to ensuring safe, enabling and gender-responsive environments. As the host of the 2021 Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, the Republic of Korea will continue to exert its active efforts to increase the number of women military observers and staff officers serving in United Nations peacekeeping operations to 25 per cent by 2028.

The implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, including preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence, has a very special meaning for the Republic of Korea. As a country that experienced the tragedy of conflict-related sexual violence, the so-called comfort women, we will continue to endeavour to restore the honour and dignity of the victims and survivors and to turn their painful experiences and courage into a historical lesson to prevent conflict-related sexual violence. As a candidate for non-permanent membership of the Security Council for the 2024-2025 term, we will also spare no effort in achieving the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace processes.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Ms. Ighil (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate the delegation of the United Kingdom on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and I wish it every success in performing its tasks.

Believing in the pivotal role of women in building sound societies and in their active and valuable participation in the political, economic and social fields, Algeria seeks to empower women and protect them against any abuse, in line with our Constitution, which ensures the protection of women from all forms of violence in all circumstances and in all professional, private and public areas. Algeria is working hard to strengthen its legal system and review its laws on the protection and promotion of women at all levels in order to ensure that they are in line with the current requirements.

Algeria also seeks to enhance the role of women as drivers for peace at the national and regional levels. That is part of our vision for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) through our national plan of action, which is a road map that identifies Algeria's priorities in promoting the role of women. We also prioritize the women and peace and security agenda.

Additionally, within the League of Arab States, Algeria spearheaded efforts to establish the Emergency Committee for the Protection of Women during Armed Conflict. That enabled the setting up of the Arab Women Mediators Network by the Arab Women's Committee in 2020, with Algeria as a member.

Regarding the African continent, women are still the main victims of conflicts, crises and enforced displacement. Algeria has therefore always called for promoting the participation of women in peace processes and their empowerment within the African Union. We hosted the first general assembly of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, which provides an institutional character to the role of women in peace negotiations. That led to further discussion on developing strategies to accelerate the role of women in peacebuilding and encouraging dialogue among members of the African Union. We sought to develop guidelines that take into account gender perspective in conflict and post-conflict recovery.

It has been more than 20 years since the adoption of the women and peace and security agenda by the Security Council and 14 years since the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), on sexual abuse in areas of conflict. However, women and girls in areas of conflict still face tremendous challenges, particularly in relation to sexual violence. There has been a recent increase in sexual violence owing to the coronavirus disease pandemic and its repercussions, with the absence of the minimum level of guarantees for the rights of victims, including access to legal aid and justice.

To ensure that sexual violence in areas of conflict is effectively addressed and ended, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law and other relevant United Nations resolutions, and out of our conviction that procedures and mechanisms need to be put in place to end these crimes and prevent their recurrence, I would like to make the following main points.

First, accountability is key to response and prevention in conflict zones. Realizing justice is a vital step in the assistance provided to survivors so that they can rebuild their lives. It gives them a chance to reintegrate into their societies.

Second, efforts to achieve justice and accountability, including reparations, should be human rights-based and take the comprehensive and non-discriminatory interests of the victims into consideration. They should be undertaken with the participation of the victims.

Third, we need to promote the legal framework to bring perpetrators of violence to justice and protect victims while ensuring them access to justice as soon as they are subjected to violence, because ending impunity will deter future violence.

Fourth, the role and prerogatives of peacekeeping operations should be enhanced when it comes to monitoring violations of human rights and addressing sexual violence. Similar mechanisms should be included in all processes without exception.

Fifth, gender-equality policies should be enhanced, and active and comprehensive national programmes and plans of action should be developed for the empowerment and protection of women, particularly in situations of conflict. This would also include measures to address violence against women and girls in national development policies.

Sixth, all stakeholders, Governments, parliaments, national human rights institutions, women's organizations, the private sector, civil society organizations and the media need to be engaged so that they all work to raise awareness of the risks of sexual violence. There should also be specialized entities for accountability.

Seventh, all obstacles should be removed so that women can work to build peace by playing the role of community leaders and defenders of human rights in conflict and occupied zones in order to address sexual violence, human rights violations and enhance accountability.

Addressing the issue of sexual violence in a comprehensive and just manner in conflict zones requires the international community, through the Security Council, to deal with all cases objectively, on a non-selective and unbiased basis, because sexual violence in conflict zones must be condemned anywhere and regardless of the identity of the perpetrator. There

must be accountability, especially if those who commit such grave violations are those in power, as is the case in areas under the control of occupying Powers.

Accordingly, I would like to refer to some facts that have been documented by a coalition of non-governmental organizations on the repeated and stark violations committed by Moroccan occupation forces in Western Sahara. Sexual violence has been used as a tool to intimidate women who are striving to defend human rights, as is the case for Sultana Khaya and Aminatou Haidar, for example. The violations have been documented by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. These systematic and repeated violations require greater attention from international bodies, particularly the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as this lies at the core of its mandate.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Castañeda Solares (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala thanks the delegation of the United Kingdom in its capacity as President of the Security Council during the month of April for convening today's open debate. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the other briefers for their briefings.

Since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), Guatemala has paid particular attention to this issue. Sexual violence against women during armed conflicts has historically been used as a tactic of war to terrorize people and is a flagrant violation of human rights. It is therefore pertinent to redouble our efforts aimed at its total eradication.

It is disturbing that even today sexual violence continues to be used to generate income through trafficking and sexual slavery, including as compensation for fighters of extremist groups. We strongly condemn all such acts as clear violations of international law and international humanitarian law.

As set forth in resolution 1820 (2008), Guatemala reiterates its deep concern that, despite its repeated condemnation of violence against women and children in situations of armed conflict, including sexual violence in such situations, and its calls to all parties to armed conflict to desist from such acts with immediate effect, such actions sadly continue to occur, and in some situations have become systematic

and widespread, attaining an alarming degree of brutality. We also express our concern on the increase in incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children in 2021, especially with the increasing number of girls affected by this situation, as noted in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272). We call on Member States to prioritize and maintain support services for child survivors of sexual violence, in particular to promote and ensure continued access to medical, psychosocial and legal assistance in these reprehensible cases.

We must emphasize the very important role that women can and should play in peacebuilding. There is an important link between the full and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution and in reconciliation and reconstruction activities, as well as in ensuring the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of such activities. Women need to be able to participate on an equal footing in all activities to maintain and promote peace and security.

The international community must remove barriers to strengthening the role of women in decision-making processes in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. There is still a need to increase women's representation at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution. Gender-equality issues must be considered in all deliberations of the Security Council in order to achieve sustainable peace.

As a State Party to the International Criminal Court, Guatemala notes that the Rome Statute constitutes the most progressive international legal framework for gender-sensitive war crimes we have seen to date. Its provisions need to be incorporated into national contexts so that States have a comprehensive framework for investigating sexual and gender-based violence crimes, specific procedures to support victims and witnesses, and programmes aimed at teaching women about the laws that apply to them, including resources to monitor the implementation of gender-sensitive laws and provisions for compensating victims. Each of these components has a significant effect on women's access to justice.

Finally, my delegation considers it of utmost importance to keep this issue on the agenda of the Security Council, taking into account the interdependence of the pillars of peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. Women

are agents of change and play an important role in strengthening the social fabric of their societies.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Muhammad Bande (Nigeria): I would like to thank the presidency of the United Kingdom for the month of April for organizing today's important open debate under the theme "Accountability as prevention — Ending cycles of sexual violence in conflict". I also would like to extend our gratitude to our briefers for their informative briefings.

Sexual violence in conflict continues to inflict pain and trauma on its victims around the world. It has a devastating impact on individuals, families and communities. Unfortunately, women and girls are disproportionately impacted by armed conflict and are usually seen by perpetrators as the spoils of war. We must therefore collectively do more to prevent such crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Today's open debate bears great relevance with respect to the terrorist atrocities of Boko Haram in the north-eastern part of Nigeria, as well as related banditry, especially in some parts of Nigeria as well, which have led to a large displacement of people. Violence against women and girls, especially within Boko Haram, has been rampant. Murder, rape and forced marriages have been used as weapons by Boko Haram.

Nigeria has always acted in a concerted manner to ensure accountability for crimes of sexual violence. It has also collaborated with the United Nations and other international partners to enhance protection against those abhorrent transgressions. Over time, such cooperation has eased the problem and made communities and areas far more secure. The problem is still a challenge for us.

It is imperative to state that the perpetrators of sexual violence must be held accountable, yet the capacity of States to do so needs to be strengthened for better assurance of success. Beyond the law enforcement approach, however, dealing with the sociopolitical economy of conflicts in a holistic manner is crucial to finding potential remedies to the situation of conflict around the world. In that regard, multilateral cooperation should be enhanced so as to strengthen States' capacities and capabilities to deal with threats posed by violent conflict, criminality and terrorism.

The Government of Nigeria has taken steps to rehabilitate victims of sexual violence, including rape, abduction, forced marriages, sexual slavery and other grave violations by Boko Haram, by putting in motion several legal and economic and social remedies, including taking perpetrators to court, the reintegration of victims and rehabilitation programmes designed to meet the needs of victims on an especially urgent basis. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of the United Nations aimed at improving inter-agency coordination, advocacy and technical support at the country level. In all that, priority must be accorded to addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, human rights abuses, exclusion and, in our context, climate change.

Nonetheless and in spite of daunting challenges, Nigeria has been at the vanguard of promoting the involvement of women in conflict resolution and in the promotion of peace and security. It is committed to ensuring the security of women and girls during armed conflict and after and to enhancing their active and direct participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It has also taken measures to enhance the security of women and girls in internally displaced persons camps, reduce their vulnerabilities and promote their safe return to their homes.

We are convinced that the United Nations remains the central platform for raising awareness of the plight of women and girls in conflict, including the peace and security agenda of the United Nations. We also acknowledge the progress made so far by the various United Nations mechanisms in addressing conflict-related sexual violence, especially the untiring efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Nigeria stands ready to continue to work with the United Nations and international partners in that important endeavour.

We take this opportunity to assure the Security Council that the Government has intensified its effort to secure the release of all abducted girls, especially those in the horrific situation of the Chibok girls. Furthermore, trauma centres have been established in different parts of the country with an adequate complement of teams of psychosocial counsellors and health professionals to assist victims on their journey towards recovery.

The absence of accountability for conflict-related sexual violence can prevent reconciliation, weaken the rule of law, undermine the development of strong

institutions and reduce the likelihood of an inclusive, full and equal participation of women in political and economic processes. It is against that backdrop that Nigeria joined the Safe Schools initiative in 2014 in response to the growing number of attacks on our schools, including, of course, the kidnapping of the Chibok girls in Borno state, Nigeria. That initiative is really an important one globally, and Nigeria is glad to have hosted one such initiative last year in Abuja. That is one of the many things that need to be done collectively.

In conclusion, we call on all States Members of the United Nations to consider innovative ways to leverage peace processes and political settlements to achieve accountability and justice for conflict-related sexual violence, thereby laying the foundations for transformation and inclusion.

Nigeria is committed to ensuring that women and girls enjoy their full rights and that those who have perpetrated sexual violence in conflict are dealt with in accordance with our national laws and international obligations. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will be mirage, without the full, free, meaningful and equal participation of women and girls all over the world.

The President: The representative of Morocco has asked for the floor to make a further statement. Given the late hour, I would be grateful if he could keep his remarks brief. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Once again, the Algerian delegation is trying to lead the international community awry and to attack my country, Morocco, through the ad nauseam repetition of baseless lies, fabrications and falsifications on the subject of Moroccan Sahara.

The Algerian delegation cited the case in which Sultana Khaya fallaciously claimed to be a human rights defender. That is a lie. The person mentioned by the Algerian delegation has nothing to do with human rights. She works for Algeria and its separatist group linked to terrorism in the Sahara, the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO), to weaponize the noble values of human rights, liberty and democracy that prevail in the Moroccan Sahara for the purpose of separatist propaganda, contrary to Security Council resolutions.

That person, Sultana Khaya, advocates armed violence against civilians in the Moroccan Sahara. She has taken courses in indoctrination, weapons-handling and military exercises from members of the Algerian military and Frente POLISARIO mercenaries. She is in no way a human rights activist, but rather an agent of the Frente POLISARIO and Algeria calling for violence and military action. She participated in courses and military exercises from 1 to 12 June 2019, organized by the Algerian Frente POLISARIO, during which she called for armed violence against civilians in the Moroccan Sahara.

I would like to show Council members these photos, which were taken at that time. She is armed with a machine gun and wearing a military outfit. She is being used by the Frente POLISARIO and Algeria to mislead the international community about alleged human rights violations in the Moroccan Sahara.

Human rights are fully and entirely protected in the Moroccan Saharan, in accordance with the highest international standards. Resolution 2602 (2021) attested to Morocco's respect for human rights and the role played by Morocco and its national institutions, in particular the National Human Rights Council and its commissions in Dakhla and Laayoune, in the promotion of human rights.

That person has not been subjected to sexual abuse or surveillance, as Algeria claims. She is acting freely. Moreover, she was contacted by the National Human Rights Council of Morocco. She refused to meet with the Council because she does not want to talk about human rights, but prefers to weaponize them.

That person left Morocco and its southern provinces with a Moroccan passport and travelled to Geneva, to the University of Boumerdes in Algeria and throughout the world to spread lies about Morocco. That is because Morocco respects and promotes internationally recognized human rights.

The Algerian delegation referred to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Ms. Mary Lawlor. I would like to correct the Algerian delegation because it is lying yet again. Ms. Lawlor is convinced of the fallacious nature of the allegations made by Sultana Khaya and definitively abandoned that case. Ms. Lawlor took that decision when she saw these truthful photos. She understood that Sultana Khaya was exploiting human rights for political and separatist purposes.

The Algerian delegation raised the alleged case of sexual violence in Moroccan Sahara. That is absolutely false. However, what is true is the case of a young Algerian Hirak men and women who are raped and sexually abused in Algerian police stations. That is a reality and has been covered by international and national media.

There is also the case of the violations of the rights of women and sexual violence in the Tindouf camps in Algeria, which is under the supervision of the Algerian authorities. I would like to refer to the cases of women and girls in the camps, who have been left to the mercy of the separatists Frente POLISARIO, which is spreading terror in the camps and is not purely civilian in nature, but heavily militarized.

The Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* has reported that the more than 150 young girls were being held against their will in those camps. In particular Maloma Morales de Matos, Darya Embarek Selma, Nadjiba Mohamed Kacem, Korja Badbad Hafed and many others were all victims of torture in the camps with the complicity of Algeria. They suffered sexual violence and sexual abuse.

The so-called head of the Frente POLISARIO, separatist Brahim Ghali, is wanted in Spain for crimes against humanity, rape and sexual violence against Khadijatou Mahmoud Mohamed Zoubeir. As I said, that person is wanted by the Spanish courts for crimes against humanity.

Algeria is in no position to talk about human rights. I would also refer to the case of child soldiers in the Frente POLISARIO, with the blessing of Algeria. Here are photos of child soldiers in the Tindouf camps in Algeria, with Algeria's blessing and complicity. These are real photos, and some appear on separatist websites of the Frente POLISARIO. They have deprived those children of their most fundamental rights, and Algeria then comes to the Security Council to talk about the situation of human rights in the Moroccan Sahara. The situation of human rights in the Moroccan Sahara is a thousand times better than the situation in Algeria.

Algeria is a serial violator of human rights and international law. My delegation would have liked not to have to make this additional statement, but as the Council heard, the delegation of Algeria attacked Morocco and the Moroccan Sahara during a debate that has nothing to do with the question of Moroccan Sahara. The question of the Moroccan Saharan has

never been noted in any of the reports — not the reports of the Special Representative nor those of the Secretary-General. As I said, the human rights situation is genuinely much better than in Algeria.

In March and May 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published two press statements on the Hirak movement and the deteriorating human rights situation in Algeria during which it reiterated that it was increasingly concerned by the situation in Algeria, where the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to peaceful assembly and the right to participation in public life continue to be attacked through the use of unnecessary and disproportionate force against peaceful protesters and through continuous arrests. It is quite rare that OHCHR would publish two alarming press communiqués on a single country in such a short space of time. That demonstrates the severity and the scale of human rights violations in Algeria.

In conclusion, on 8 March, during the forty-ninth session of the Human Rights Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights made the following oral statement.

(spoke in English)

“In Algeria, I am concerned by increasing restrictions on fundamental freedoms, including an increase in arrests and detentions of human rights defenders, civil society members and political opponents. I call on the Government to change course and take all necessary steps to guarantee its people's rights to freedom of speech, association and peaceful assembly.”

The President: The representative of Algeria has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I ask her to make her remarks brief. She will be the last speaker. I give the floor to the of representative Algeria.

Ms. Ighil (Algeria) *(spoke in Arabic)*: It appears that the representative of Morocco really believes in lying until people believe his lies. Once again, he is repeating before the Security Council lies and fabrications about Sahrawi children who are subjected to violations in refugee camps and his false accusations about recruiting them. It is a hopeless attempt to convince some that his accusations are true. Those accusations are refuted and contradicted by United Nations reports and agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations that visit the

refugee camps regularly. That phenomenon simply does not exist in those camps.

In January, Mr. Stéphane Dujarric, the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General categorically denied the false information reported by the Moroccan media about the alleged presence of child soldiers during a visit to refugee camps by the Personal Envoy for Western Sahara. It is a desperate attempt to defame the struggle of the Sahrawi people and mislead the international community about the core of the conflict, which is the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara.

Instead of providing that false information, the representative of Morocco should have focused on the situation of children in his country, who are suffering from hunger and poverty. There are a great many

school drop-outs in that country, where a large number of children use drugs. Innocent children are being used as a political tool by Morocco rulers, leading to tragic circumstances in which they are subjected to all forms of sexual violence by some who enjoy the protection of the authorities and officials. This is the bitter truth that is ignored by the representative of Morocco.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The late hour and the large number of speakers today only reflects the strength of concern and interest in this topic. I would like to thank the interpreters and the Secretariat in particular for staying so late.

The meeting rose at 7.50 p.m.