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Friday, 26 April 2024, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Ms. Gatt. (Malta)

Members:

Algeria	Ms. Samai
China	Mr. Tian Bingxu
Ecuador	Ms. Mendez Gruezo
France	Mr. Leclerc
Guyana	Ms. Persaud
Japan	Mr. Ono
Mozambique	Mr. Buanahagi
Republic of Korea	Ms. Chung
Russian Federation.	Mr. Kashaev
Sierra Leone	Ms. Karim
Slovenia	Mrs. Ponikvar
Switzerland	Mrs. Baumann-Bresolin
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Gibbon
United States of America.	Ms. Luquetta

Agenda

Women and peace and security

Preventing conflict-related sexual violence through demilitarization and gender-responsive arms control

Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-related sexual violence (S/2024/292)

Letter dated 16 April 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2024/311)

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The meeting was resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President: I wish 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 collars of the microphones will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after four minutes.

I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Miller (Israel): At the outset, I would like to thank the Deputy Prime Minister of Malta for originally convening this important annual open debate.

As conflict-related sexual violence remains an underreported phenomenon across the world, it is vital that the Council continue to meet and discuss new trends and ongoing challenges in the global fight against conflict-related sexual violence. I would also like to reiterate Israel's strong support for the mandate of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten pattern and her Team of Experts and to express Israel's gratitude for the important work that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her team have been doing for women and girls across the world, including for women and girls in Israel.

Every year, the Secretary-General's report on conflict-related sexual violence reminds the international community how urgent a task it is to end sexual violence as a weapon of war and as a tool of terrorism. For Israel, the report plays two important roles in this global fight.

First, the report ensures that the abhorrent crimes committed against women and girls, as well as against men and boys, are not left in the shadows of history. It is all too often the case that survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are not believed. In that regard, Israel sees the report as an important milestone in the survivors' fight for justice. That has been all the truer for Israeli women and girls, as the international community turned a blind eye on Israeli women and girls, and the stories of victims and survivors of the heinous sexual and gender-based crimes committed by Hamas on 7 October were neglected and even dehumanized. We thank the Special Representative and her team for standing up for all women and girls, regardless of their nationality, and for shedding light on those whom the world did not want to see.

Secondly, the report not only constitutes an important historical record of conflict-related sexual

violence crimes, but it is an indispensable tool to address conflict-related sexual violence through sanctions. Therefore, the report warrants that the international community start taking steps towards accountability. For that reason, Israel was shocked and disappointed with the fact that Hamas — the instigator and perpetrator of the 7 October massacre, which included numerous acts of sexual and gender-based violence — was not mentioned in the annex list (see S/2024/292, annex). The exclusion of that terror organization from the list of parties credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of conflict-related sexual violence sends the wrong message to the perpetrators. Moreover, weapons are still being supplied to Hamas, weapons we know are being used against the Israeli women, including young women, who are still being held in Gaza.

The demilitarization and disarmament of Hamas and the deradicalization of the Gaza Strip through education for peace and coexistence are key to ensuring that the abhorrent crimes carried out on 7 October will not be committed again against the women and girls in Israel and beyond. There will be no peace as long as children are taught to hate. As for the allegations of misconduct against Palestinians in detention mentioned in the report, those allegations have regretfully been made in a clear attempt to balance Hamas's crimes with Israeli misconduct, as conflict-related sexual violence was never part of the conflict prior to Hamas's brutal and atrocious attack. Nonetheless, Israel is a transparent democracy with all necessary mechanisms to evaluate any claims of misconduct. Such allegations are reviewed by Israel in accordance with the robust procedures and instruments it has in place for that purpose.

Many in this Chamber have called for ending impunity and strengthening accountability. Now it is time for the international community to turn those words into reality. We call upon the Council to add stand-alone listing criteria related to conflict-related sexual violence, to designate Hamas as a terrorist organization and to call for the immediate release of all hostages. As Jews in Israel and around the world celebrate Passover, the holiday in which the Jewish people were freed from slavery, we pray for our people to be released from Gaza. Bring them all home now.

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

Mr. Sabanovic (Montenegro): At the outset, I wish to stress that Montenegro fully aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security and the LGBTI Core Group. We would like to make additional remarks in our national capacity.

I would like to begin by thanking Malta for organizing this important discussion and Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, for her detailed briefing.

As we gather for the open debate of the Security Council on conflict-related sexual violence, it is paramount to address the disproportionate and unique gendered impacts of weapons, acknowledging that women constitute fewer than one third of participants in multilateral disarmament meetings. That underrepresentation underscores the urgent need to prioritize women's full and meaningful participation in arms control and disarmament efforts.

Montenegro has been steadfast in its commitment to promoting gender equality and preventing conflict-related sexual violence. We recognize the importance of alignment with international frameworks such as resolution 1325 (2000), which calls for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, and resolution 2122 (2013), which emphasizes women's involvement in arms control at all decision-making levels. Our achievements in that realm are evidenced by the adoption of a strategy for the implementation of the Security Council resolution on women and peace and security and related resolutions, for the period 2023–2027. That strategic document outlines our overarching goal of advancing the position of women and girls in peace and security processes. It also includes operational objectives and an action plan aimed at strengthening gender equality in the security sector, increasing the representation of women in institutions and preventing all forms of discrimination and violence.

Montenegro has actively collaborated with international partners, including the United Nations Development Programme and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Mission to Montenegro, on diverse activities, such as media training, administrative capacity-building and combating hate speech and violence. Our collaborative projects extended to gender-responsive budgeting, which is recognized as a vital tool to foster gender equality.

Furthermore, our alignment with the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects has been instrumental in conducting gender- and age-related assessments and data collection, and enhancing the gender responsiveness of our national arms control policies and legislation.

In conclusion, Montenegro remains committed to preventing conflict-related sexual violence, promoting gender equality and upholding human rights. Through robust collaborations, legislative frameworks and capacity-building initiatives, we strive to create a safer and more equitable world for all, in which every individual, irrespective of gender, enjoys equal opportunities and rights.

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

Ms. Michail (Cyprus): We express our appreciation to Malta for organizing this debate. Allow me also to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for her insightful briefing and Ms. Ahmadi and Ms. Gurira for their valuable inputs.

Cyprus fully subscribes to the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

It is a sad reality that conflict-related sexual violence is entrenched in warfare. Conflict-related sexual violence is not an isolated activity. It is deeply rooted in historical inequalities and patriarchal social structures, exacerbated by the proliferation of arms and increased militarization. Victims and survivors are often living ashamed in the shadow, awaiting justice and redress when the culture of impunity unfortunately prevails.

Cyprus strongly condemns gender-based violence in all its forms and manifestations, online and offline, including all acts of sexual violence in armed conflicts.

Resolution 1325 (2000) recognized that sexual violence is a peace and security issue. Resolution 1820 (2008) recognized sexual violence as a weapon and tactic of war, stressing the importance of ending impunity for such acts. Despite the adoption of those two landmark resolutions, it is deeply alarming that in conflict-affected regions around the world, conflict-related sexual violence is still used as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism.

Cyprus recalls that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide. Conflict-related sexual violence is a peace and security issue and an impediment to the restoration of peace, requiring specific operational and policy responses.

The proliferation of weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons, is a factor that has been recognized as a contributor to sexual violence in conflict. However, little has been done to address those factors so as to prevent conflict-related sexual violence.

Allow me to add some points in today's discussion.

First, arms control and disarmament instruments are critical tools of prevention. A gender-responsive implementation of arms control has a substantial role to play in preventing conflict-related sexual violence and reducing the proliferation of weapons facilitating conflict-related sexual violence.

Secondly, we lack specific data to better understand the link between weapons, and especially small arms and light weapons, and conflict-related sexual violence. It is crucial to support the collection of more disaggregated data, as well as to pursue and fund specific research on the link between small arms and light weapons and conflict-related sexual violence. Those data and research will assist us in elaborating more targeted policy, legislative and implementation frameworks, with special emphasis also on prevention efforts.

Thirdly, women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, yet not fully included in the key decision-making structures related to peace and security. In that regard, concrete measures to secure the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women at all levels of decision-making on peace and security, including in decision-making regarding security issues, is a *sine qua non*.

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. We pledge to continue working with the international community to protect and empower women, girls, men and boys, in all their diversity, in conflict-related situations, strengthening the global response to conflict-related sexual violence. It is more important than ever to strengthen the global response to this heinous crime and adopt a survivor-

centred approach, while at the same time ensuring justice and accountability for all victims and survivors.

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

Mrs. Fyneah (Liberia): We thank the Republic of Malta for convening this important debate. We would also like to commend Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Patten and the briefers for their insightful briefings depicting the dire and dehumanizing conditions of defenceless women and girls trapped in conflict zones around the world, while stressing the need for urgent and concrete measures aimed at addressing increased conflict-related sexual violence and other atrocious acts committed with impunity during armed conflicts.

Liberia reaffirms its commitment to resolution 1325 (2000), which calls for all parties to armed conflict to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, including rape and other forms of sexual abuse, as well as its commitment to the principles of the women and peace and security agenda, particularly as they relate to addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

We are aware that conflict-related sexual violence is a grave violation of human rights, often carried out during times of conflict. That tragic and pervasive aspect of conflict leaves lasting scars on individuals, families and communities long after the fighting has ended.

Although the guns have been silenced in my country for approximately 20 years, the adverse effects of the war still linger. In today's reality, the escalation of conflicts makes it increasingly urgent to implement resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence and conventions on arms proliferation and to enforce the Arms Trade Treaty, as well as the application of international laws, to prevent that scourge and protect women and girls. There is a need to holistically review instruments and frameworks that focus on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and the protection of women and girls and to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

Liberia firmly believes that ensuring accountability is paramount. Perpetrators of sexual violence must be held responsible through thorough investigations and legal action. We must also create safe spaces for reporting incidents and ensure that survivors feel safe and supported when coming forward, providing them

with justice and reparations. My country strongly believes that addressing gender inequality, the training of security personnel, community engagement, accountability and responsiveness can serve as a deterrent to the pervasive act of violence against women and girls.

In conclusion, let us recommit ourselves to the principles of the women and peace and security agenda and work tirelessly to end conflict-related sexual violence. The time for action is now, and we must act urgently to protect the rights and dignity of all individuals, especially women and girls affected by conflict.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mrs. Liolocha (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): First and foremost, my delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Republic of Malta for organizing this open debate on conflict-related sexual violence through demilitarization and gender-responsive arms control. This is an opportunity for us to reflect on this emerging issue, which is associated with the systemic use by State and non-State actors of sexual violence as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism in armed conflict.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the ongoing efforts of Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and her Office's support for the Congolese Government's efforts to combat conflict-related sexual violence. At the same time, we welcome the statement made the other day by Ms. Danai Gurira, UN-Women Goodwill Ambassador, who underscored the devastating situation of women and children in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It is unfortunate to note that sexual violence is associated with armed conflict, and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it has been systematically used for decades as a weapon of war and to destroy the social fabric. Congolese women have lost all human dignity. Many of them have endured rape, sexual violence and other cruel inhumane and degrading treatment, in all particular in mining areas.

This situation is exacerbated by the weak suppression of its perpetrators, by the proliferation and illegal trafficking of small arms and light weapons and by armed groups who plunder the Democratic Republic

of the Congo's natural resources, with the complicity of neighbouring countries, such as the Movement du 23 mars, with the support of the Rwanda Defence Force. It is time that the Security Council unanimously condemned this situation and worked to put a definitive end to it so that, at least this time, justice is done.

Despite this situation, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has made considerable efforts, with the support of its partners, to put in place a normative and institutional framework conducive to combating conflict-related sexual violence and to protecting victims by providing them access to justice and reparations.

This is an opportunity to highlight our progress and share our best practices. In that regard, we note the revised national strategy to combat gender-based violence; the zero-tolerance policy for perpetrators of rape, launched in 2021; the Kinshasa agreements on positive masculinity for the elimination of violence against women and girls; the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme; the creation of a national fund for reparations for victims of sexual violence and other serious crimes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, known as FONAREV; our five-year national action plan 2024-2028 for the control of small arms and light weapons; the establishment of a task force to monitor and evaluate this project; and the establishment of the National Commission for Transitional Justice, known as CNJT.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that my Government remains ready to continue working in full transparency with all bilateral and multilateral partners in order to put an end to this scourge.

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

Mr. Tun (Myanmar): I thank the presidency of Malta for organizing this annual open debate on preventing conflict-related sexual violence, with a specific focus on demilitarization and gender-responsive arms control. I also appreciate all briefers for their comprehensive insights.

This annual open debate is timely, as women and girls are continuously at risk of being subjected to gender-based violence in the form of sexual violence, particularly in various conflict settings.

The increase of conflict-related sexual violence across the world is alarming. We heard the briefers'

appeals loud and clear. It is the responsibility of Member States to protect women and girls from conflict-related sexual violence by taking effective action in a timely manner. In that regard, the Security Council can play a pivotal role by using all available tools to protect them.

Myanmar unequivocally condemns conflict-related sexual violence and all forms of violence against women and girls anywhere and under any circumstance.

Since the illegal military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, the military junta's atrocities and serious violations of human rights, including the commission of conflict-related sexual violence against innocent civilians, are more visible, systematic, coordinated and extensive. Women and youth have been targeted by the military junta throughout the illegal coup because of their active participation in the revolution against the military junta.

For so many decades, the Myanmar military has been known for using rape as a weapon of war. Now, women human rights defenders are facing a heightened risk of being subjected to all forms of violence, particularly sexual violence, as a tactic of war by the military junta.

Before our very eyes, the Myanmar military's possession of weaponry has proven only its ambition to commit conflict-related sexual violence, massacres, crimes against humanity and war crimes against civilians. The military junta's atrocities and conflict-related sexual violence are well-documented by the United Nations and other international organizations. I will therefore not repeat them here. Due to the military junta's various atrocities, the people have suffered greatly. More than 2.8 million people became internally displaced. Almost 19 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Over 85,000 homes have been burnt down or destroyed. That suffering was further compounded by the military junta's recent unlawful forced conscription. In order to avoid forced conscription, many young people, including girls, are hiding or fleeing the country.

The National Unity Government, together with ethnic resistance organizations and the people of Myanmar, has done its utmost to protect women and girls and prevent conflict-related sexual violence. We are all working together to the end military dictatorship and build a federal democratic union.

In March, the National Unity Government issued a military code of conduct for the People's Defence Force. Pursuant to that code of conduct, the People's Defence Force shall respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and violators shall be seriously charged in accordance with existing laws. Moreover, its troops shall not physically, mentally or sexually assault any civilian. This code of conduct is communicated to the forces on the ground.

In conclusion, the National Unity Government, together with ethnic resistance and civil society organizations, is trying its best to protect women and girls from conflict-related sexual violence, despite various challenges and limitations. But we still need effective support from the international community and Member States if we are to protect our women and girls.

We therefore repeatedly appeal to the international community, especially Security Council member States, to take certain actions: first, to cut flows of money and weapons and deny legitimacy to the military junta; secondly, to provide humanitarian aid directly to those in need through all available channels, including cross-border aid in a sustainable and predictable manner; thirdly, to provide us effective political, diplomatic, financial support; fourthly, to help us build our capability to end the military dictatorship; and fifthly, to end the impunity of the military forces by referring the Myanmar situation to the International Criminal Court.

It is also critically important to bring justice to the victims of the military junta's atrocities, including conflict-related sexual violence. We must hold these perpetrators accountable through justice. Their enjoyment of blanket impunity must end. Doing so will help prevent the recurrence of such atrocities and conflict-related sexual violence in Myanmar.

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

Mr. Lagorio (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Throughout history, sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war, and often as a deliberate strategy in the conduct of hostilities. Since the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), there has been a growing public awareness of such crimes and their consequences. Sexual violence perpetuates conflict and instability. Its long-term destructive nature has devastating effects, not only on the survivors of this crime, but on entire communities.

Deeply rooted in gender inequality, conflict-related sexual violence is a complex phenomenon with multiple and overlapping causes. Addressing it therefore requires a multi-pronged approach that works both on long-term structural prevention and on short-term, more operational prevention in order to address and mitigate the immediate causes.

The rise of armed conflict and the proliferation of weapons are two related factors that fuel the systematic and widespread occurrence of sexual violence in conflict. Apart from that recognition, however, little has been done to address arms proliferation as part of efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence. The proliferation of weapons and the illicit arms trade are increasing the use of sexual violence by armed groups, organized crime and terrorist groups. Most incidents of conflict-related sexual violence involve firearms, which are used to intimidate, coerce, injure and kill civilians in the context of rape, abduction, forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence. Effective arms regulation can strengthen the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. Control and disarmament reduce the proliferation of arms that facilitate such crimes and create a more conducive environment for peacebuilding.

However, despite the numerous international instruments that call for protecting civilians from sexual assault in armed conflict and recognizing that such acts can constitute war crimes, conflict-related sexual violence continues to prevail in a culture of near-total impunity. Accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence is vital to ensuring justice for victims and deterring potential future criminals. The perpetrators of such crimes may bear individual criminal responsibility under international law, and States have a primary obligation to prosecute them. When a State is unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute international crimes, including conflict-related sexual crimes, the international community should take steps to refer the matter to the International Criminal Court. The Rome Statute makes it clear that rape and all other forms of conflict-related sexual violence are war crimes and crimes against humanity. It should not be forgotten that during the attacks on Israel on 7 October last year, numerous acts of sexual violence were committed by members of the Hamas terrorist group, and we therefore believe that both those acts and those responsible for them should be condemned in the strongest terms. Argentina calls

for the immediate release of the hostages who are still being held by Hamas and who are victims of sexual violence and other cruel, inhumane and degrading acts.

In conclusion, we would like to recall that in 2015, at the initiative of Argentina and the United Kingdom, the General Assembly adopted resolution 69/293, proclaiming 19 June the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, in order to raise awareness of the need to end conflict-related sexual violence and to honour the victims and survivors of sexual violence.

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

Mr. Yoseph (Ethiopia): My delegation takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/292). My statement will focus on the aspects of the annual report that have to do with my country, Ethiopia.

While Ethiopia has faced security challenges in the past few years, our path to paving the way to peace and stability is currently producing encouraging outcomes. In parallel with those efforts, we have continued to address all allegations of violations of human rights, including of violations and crimes committed against women and children. The Government of Ethiopia has given the greatest possible attention to all such allegations of human rights violations, including those cited in the report presented for this meeting. We denounce all such crimes, including sexual violence committed in the context of conflict, and we are steadfast in our efforts to prevent such crimes and investigate them when they are reported in order to ensure accountability and redress. Because any allegation deserves further inquiry, and because every violation is one too many, we are always committed to investigating any allegations even in the absence of any corroboration. Ethiopia does not concur with any of the allegations, which, as in the past, have never been verified or brought to our attention for the necessary measures to be taken.

Based on that, I will share information on the measures that Ethiopia has taken to address human rights violations in the context of conflict, and which we have brought to the attention of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in previous years. However, the Special Representative's report and analysis continue to use sources that are not credible and do not in any way assist the ongoing efforts to ensure accountability and redress. That approach is not constructive, and we ask

the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to reconsider it and remove Ethiopia from the report.

The national mechanisms that we have put in place to ensure accountability and redress for the heinous crimes of sexual violence are within Ethiopia's legal framework, which forbids statutory limitation, pardon or amnesty for such crimes. Those mechanisms of accountability in the military justice system and regular law enforcement already ensure the accountability of individual perpetrators. More importantly, Ethiopia previously adopted a transitional justice policy with the objective of addressing crimes committed in the context of conflicts that occurred in past years. In manifesting our commitment to that cause, we worked with several United Nations agencies in the process.

While there may be some continuing challenges on the ground, I would like to register our rejection of the

approach that we continue to see in this Chamber, an approach that propagates hostile activism. The primary responsibility for ensuring the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights resides with States. Any politicizations of human rights and any double standards or selectivity will only lead to irreparable damage to the credibility of the international system and undermine cooperation with national institutions.

In conclusion, I would like to underscore that Ethiopia condemns any violations of human rights or related crimes, including crimes of sexual violence. We also remain steadfast in ensuring accountability and redress. No allegation will go unheard, uninvestigated and unpunished after due process of law.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.