Statement by
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At the Security Council High Level Open Debate
On
“WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT”

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Mr. President,

1. I congratulate Germany on its Presidency of the Security Council for this month, and I thank you for organizing today’s open debate. I also thank H.E. Mr. António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and other briefers for their enlightening briefings.

2. This open debate comes at an important time for Rwanda. This month of April 2019, marks 25 years since the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda where rape was widely used in the execution of the genocide. I will make my intervention this afternoon with this context in mind.

3. It is in 1998, at the trial of a genocide convict, Jean-Paul Akayesu, a former mayor of a district in Rwanda during the genocide, that the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) ruled for the first time that rape was used as means of perpetrating genocide aimed at exterminating a targeted group and therefore constituted an act of genocide.

Mr. President,

4. My first point is on impunity; If we are going to address the widespread use of sexual violence in conflict as a weapon of war, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, and even extermination of
targeted groups - in the extreme case of genocide, we need to address the central issue of the culture of impunity, which has become the default response to sexual violence in conflict. Fighting impunity contributes to prevention of future crimes, healing and reintegration of survivors in their communities.

5. My second point is on prevention; I would like to make the following recommendations;
   a. Prevention of sexual violence begins with strong institutions and comprehensive legal frameworks during times of peace. National judicial institutions and legal instruments should be robust enough to address cases of sexual violence on an equal footing with other criminal activities.

   b. The UN Security Council should consider expanding designation criteria for individuals who perpetrate sexual violence in the context of conflicts. Relevant sanctions committees should work very closely with the office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict in order to regularly appraise cases of sexual violence.

   c. We should invest in survivor-centered approaches which prioritize the rights and special needs of the victims of sexual and gender-based violence. These entail provision of appropriate medical, psycho-social and socioeconomic
reintegration support in order to reinstate the social fabric of societies in post conflict settings.

d. It is equally important to involve women in conflict resolutions, peace agreement negotiations, peacekeeping operations, peacebuilding and reconciliation at all levels.

6. My third and last point is on the survivors-centered approach; Survivors of sexual violence face an uphill task recovering and rebuilding their lives. Their experience of sexual violence leaves lasting marks of psychological and physical trauma. They deal with sexually-transmitted diseases which create extensive health problems that are difficult to address in post-conflict societies. We need a more holistic and effective support system for survivors that will enable them to move from being victims to resilient survivors and empowered members of their communities.

7. The pains and trauma are also inherited by the children who are conceived through rape. As they grow through adulthood, they try to come to terms with an identity that no parent would wish on a child. These children also require extensive psychosocial services to help guide them through their unique experiences.
Mr. President,

8. In closing, allow us to offer the following three suggestions

a) We need to improve our understanding of the ideology behind sexual violence in conflicts. Bodies of women, girls and children from targeted groups, have become the new battlefields where wars are fought with the intention of destroying the social fabric of targeted communities.

b) We need to scale up accountability of leaders of armed groups or politicians promoting or enabling the use of sexual violence in conflicts. Even if justice cannot undo the atrocious crimes of sexual violence, without justice there cannot be an end to the culture of impunity and continuous cycle of violence.

c) Both in the provision of justice for and support to the victims and survivors, we need a survivors-centered support to shift the shame and stigma on perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict.

I thank you for your kind attention