



## The Republic of the Gambia

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### SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE

#### *Women, Peace and Security: Sexual Violence in Conflict*

Mr. President,  
Esteemed Ministers,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I proceed to make my statement, I would like to express my profound condolences to the people and Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for the tragedy caused by the terror attacks on Easter Sunday. We condemn these despicable acts in the strongest terms.

Mr. President,

The Republic of the Gambia strongly supports the activities aimed at preventing all forms of violence, including sexual violence in armed conflicts. Considering this issue within the United Nations, with full cooperation by all relevant actors - States, international organizations and civil society - is a prerequisite for a wider, more efficient and effective engagement. The first steps in this direction were made by the adoption of UNSCR 1325 (2000). The Republic of the Gambia supports the efforts of the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary General and other UN mechanisms made to further these goals.

Recognizing the importance of the global efforts to combat sexual violence in conflicts, The Republic of the Gambia endorses the "Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict" proposed by the Great Britain in a meeting held

on the sidelines of the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2013.

Proceeding from UNSCR 1325 (2000), The Republic of the Gambia adopted the National Action Plan on its implementation in the period 2017-2020. After all, our common goal at the global level cannot be achieved without adequate measures at the national level. The national measures are aimed, among others, at establishing an effective prevention system and at punishing perpetrators.

The Republic of the Gambia is a State party to the African Union and supports the efforts of the International Criminal Court to prosecute crimes of sexual violence in conflicts. Also, The Republic of the Gambia has appreciated full cooperation with the Hague Tribunal which, among other things, deals with the prosecution of crimes of sexual violence in conflicts in the territory of the DRC, Rwanda and Kenya while the Office of the War Crimes Prosecutor deals with the issue at the national level.

There is no doubt that each and every crime deserves punishment.

This is true of the crimes committed during armed conflicts, as well as of the crimes committed in the aftermath of the conflict, when the vulnerability of certain categories of persons, such as women, children and the elderly, is patently evident. The stigma, as well as the profound psychological consequences are felt long after and the victims avoid speaking of their suffering for many years. The new narrative of the Republic of the Gambia supports the victim-centered approach, aimed at providing comprehensive medical, psychological, legal and socio-economic assistance.

The encouragement of victims of sexual violence to report the crime is the first step towards the investigation and punishment of perpetrators and the efforts to prevent the crime. It is therefore important to ensure that victims have an opportunity to report cases of sexual violence during and after the conflict. The Republic of the Gambia is committed to establishing a system of prevention through the inclusion of gender dimension in its national security forces, as well as in international peacekeeping missions.

One victim of the violence is one too many and each victim is entitled to access to justice.

At the same time, speculating with the numbers of victims and the insistence on a "hierarchy of victims" by ethnic, religious and other affiliations or by the gender

of the victim often leads to politization and does not contribute to the achievement of reconciliation in post-conflict, indigenous and developing societies.

Witness protection is of particular importance for determining accountability and for punishing perpetrators. In the absence of written documents, the most important sources of evidence are witness testimonies. Governments, therefore, as well as other international institutions involved in the prosecution of these crimes, must provide adequate witness protection, including exclusion of the public from the process and the protection of witness and victim identity.

The international community should support the countries through various programs of empowerment of the existing institutions of the system or help establish new institutions, including the "ad hoc" courts for the violence of any kind, especially sexual violence, in conflict areas. Other relevant measures include mediation mandatory training and conflict negotiations at local and national levels.

All parties involved in armed conflicts should provide for the necessary measures; after all, it is never too late to punish perpetrators and achieve justice that all victims deserve.