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STATEMENT

BY

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AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

**73RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

**AT
THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON**

**THE OPEN DEBATE IN CONNECTION WITH THE
AGENDA ITEM “WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY:
SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT”**

**NEW YORK
23 APRIL 2019**

Mr. President,

1. I would like to start by thanking you for organizing this Open Debate on the topic of sexual violence in conflict.
2. I thank all the briefers for their riveting, detailed and comprehensive briefings.
3. My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by H.E. Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations, as well as that of the Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada, speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

Mr. President,

4. As we mark the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the mandate of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Secretary-General's most recent report on conflict-related sexual violence reminds us that, while there has been a paradigm shift in how this Organization and Governments address these crimes, there is much work that remains to be done on the ground.
5. Accountability for these crimes must be guaranteed. As the report of the Secretary-General notes: "Accountability remains elusive". The report further notes that "across most countries, victims express reluctance to report their experiences owing to stigma, the fear of reprisal, rejection by their families and communities, and their lack of confidence in judicial and non-judicial responses". This must change. Actionable change, first and foremost, must come from Member States. International and regional organizations must also play a role. Furthermore, civil society organizations can play a guiding role, given their presence on the ground and contact with survivors and perpetrators. A survivor-centered approach must be at the heart of our programmes, interventions and investments. As outlined in the Secretary-General's report, "sexual violence results in multiple consequences for survivors and their families". They often require immediate, life-saving health care, including sexual and reproductive healthcare services. Greater efforts also need to be made to ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration into their communities.

Mr. President,

6. The African Union (AU) has taken a strong stance on sexual violence in conflict and underscored its full commitment to eradicating Sexual and Gender Based Violence on the African continent. In 2018, the AU and its Member States endorsed the “Policy on Prevention and Response to sexual Exploitation and Abuse for Peace Support Operations”. This Policy notably aims to strengthen leadership and management engagement, roles and responses to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Member States of the AU have also adhered to a number of instruments developed by the body. This includes the Protocol to the African charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted in 2003, and the solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, adopted in 2004. The Women, Gender and Development Directorate and the Office of the AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security led the operationalization of these various instruments. On a larger scale, the AU-UN partnership, especially in the area of Women, Peace and Security, has contributed to strengthening this partnership and the work in this field.
7. Within the SADC region, the people of the DRC continue to be faced with conflict-related sexual violence. The report of the Secretary-General clearly outlines the severity and number of these crimes: in 2018, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) documented 1,049 cases of conflict-related sexual violence. There are, no doubt, many more cases which have gone unreported. The SADC-deployed Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) under MONUSCO, and the government of the DRC are working together to combat and eradicate sexual violence in conflict, notably with the training of commanders and security officers on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence.
8. In 2008, SADC adopted a Protocol on Gender and Development. The Protocol sets out six specific targets, notably the need to enact and enforce legislation prohibiting all forms of gender-based violence and the need to ensure that the laws on gender based violence provide for the comprehensive testing, treatment and care of survivors of sexual assault. The SADC Gender Protocol Barometer is updated annually by the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance and measures the success of these six commitments at the Member State level.

9. In Namibia, laws on gender-based violence have been strengthened over the years, and a new Clinical Handbook for Survivors subjected to Intimate Partner Violence and/or Sexual Violence was recently approved by the Ministry of Health and will be issued for distribution shortly. The publication will be used by medical professionals, social workers, counselors, law enforcement agencies and others to help and improve services to victims and survivors

Mr. President,

10. Next year's 20th anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 should spur us to redouble our efforts to strengthen prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence, to promote a survivor-center concept of justice and accountability and address the root causes of these violations. Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are very often young women and men. They represent the future of the DRC, the Central African Republic, Mali and many other countries. We must ensure and protect their future to enable them to successfully contribute to the rebuilding of their respective countries.

Thank you.