

CANZ Statement: Commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, 21 June 3 – 5.30pm

Panel Discussion “Justice and Accountability: Addressing Sexual Violence Crimes”, moderated by Ambassador Moritán (Argentina)

Thank you Mr Chair. I deliver this statement on behalf of Canada, New Zealand, and my own country, Australia.

We thank Argentina for its leadership and commitment to raising awareness to prevent, combat and end all forms of conflict-related sexual violence. We also thank the distinguished panellists – survivors and advocates – for selflessly sharing your personal and poignant experiences so that others may benefit.

Mr Chair

As highlighted during the recent debate of the Security Council on conflict-related sexual violence, and by the Secretary-General in his recent report, sexual violence in conflict is unacceptable, as are the increasing instances of its use.

A key driver behind this horrific trend is the rise of extremist movements and their use of sexual violence as a tactic of terrorism. In this regard, we welcome the focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the UN Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism and we urge States to take practical steps to implement the Plan and to counter the use of sexual violence as a tactic of terrorism.

Giving consideration in peace agreements to the elimination of sexual-violence in conflict, as well as to the role of women in attaining and maintaining peace and security, is also crucial.

This can produce a more sustainable and durable peace by mitigating security fears and improving transparency, accountability and confidence among the parties.

Mr Chair

We must work to prevent, combat and put an end to all forms of conflict-related sexual violence and to sexual exploitation and abuse. We should give special consideration to protecting vulnerable groups including women, children, people with disabilities and those targeted on the basis of their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, and assist the victims of sexual violence.

We must promote accountability and fight impunity of the perpetrators of these crimes. Effective legislative and institutional arrangements are integral to addressing conflict-related sexual violence and to preventing its recurrence, including through special victim and witness protection laws and support for victims.

It is also important to ensure that educational services foster gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Women and girls, including those who become pregnant as a result of rape, must have the information and services they need to support and protect their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Mr Chair, we cannot under estimate the importance of accountability in addressing sexual violence in conflict.

Strengthening the capacity of national institutions is critical in this regard and National Human Rights Institutions can play a key role in all stages of conflict: in early prevention, as the ears and eyes of human rights abuses in the national context; in upholding standards during conflict; and importantly, in documenting and reporting instances to ensure future accountability.

We need to ensure that we provide a safe enabling environment, to protect national institutions and civil society actors from reprisals so that they can carry-out these responsibilities unhindered.

Mr Chair

We must take these measures and more in order to address this menace as soon as possible.

Lastly, Australia, Canada and New Zealand take this opportunity to recognize the work undertaken by the UN to fight conflict-related sexual violence.

Here we cite the work of Special Representative Zainab Bangura, her office, the Team of Experts for Rule of Law and Sexual Violence, as well as UN Action for its work in coordinating the response to sexual violence by some 13 agencies.

In keeping with the theme of this debate, we also cite the work of UN-Women, particularly its partnership with Justice Rapid Response, for the deployment of experts to address sexual violence in conflict, including for the important work of investigating

and formally documenting the abuse in efforts to hold perpetrators to account and afford justice for the survivors.

Thank you.