

15 YEAR ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION

MANDATE ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra



Permanent Mission of Norway
to the United Nations
New York

Concept Note

Commemoration of the 15-Year Anniversary of the Establishment of the Mandate on Sexual Violence in Conflict

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### Date & Time:

Wednesday 23 October 2024, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. – 6 p.m.

### Location:

ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters, New York, USA

### Co-hosted by:

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC) and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government of Norway, the Government of Sierra Leone, the Government of Switzerland, the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the United States of America.

### Background:

In 2024, the United Nations marks the 15-year anniversary of the establishment of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict established through the unanimous adoption of **Security Council resolution 1888 (2009)**. This resolution called for a **Special Representative** to provide coherent and strategic leadership to UN efforts to address sexual violence in conflict, while promoting cooperation and coordination of efforts among all relevant stakeholders, primarily through the interagency initiative **UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action)**. It further requested the entities comprising UN Action to support the work of the Special Representative through enhanced



information sharing and efforts to avoid gaps and overlaps in the UN system-wide response at both headquarters and country levels.<sup>1</sup>

Security Council resolution 1888 also established a **Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict (TOE)** to strengthen institutional safeguards against impunity for these crimes and to help build the capacity of national justice and security sectors that have been weakened by war. It further mandated the deployment of dedicated **Women’s Protection Advisers (WPAs)** to the field to enhance monitoring, reporting and response efforts, including dialogue with the parties to armed conflict to obtain concrete and time-bound protection commitments. Together, the SRSO, the UN Action network, the TOE and WPAs form an integrated prevention and response architecture to address the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

The most recent annual *Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292)*, covering the year 2023, compiled by the OSRSG-SVC, spans 21 settings of concern. Moreover, the Annex to the report lists 50 State and non-State armed groups who are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict on the Security Council’s agenda. Many of these groups have been repeatedly listed for several years as the violations continue unabated and the required corrective and remedial measures are yet to be adopted.

The intervening decade has seen a dramatic **paradigm and perspective shift** in the treatment of conflict-related sexual violence, which is now understood as a threat to both individual and collective security, and an impediment to the restoration of peace. This has lent a new sense of urgency and seriousness to efforts to confront a scourge that had been called “history’s greatest silence” and the “world’s least-condemned crime of war”. Today, the concept of conflict-related sexual violence, as a **war crime, crime against humanity and/or constituent act of genocide that cannot be amnestied** in the context of peace negotiations and transitional justice processes, has gained widespread acceptance. The **circle of stakeholders** has expanded considerably to embrace new and non-traditional actors, such as peace negotiators and mediators, military and police, peacekeeping personnel, ceasefire monitors, sanctions experts, war crimes investigators, and religious and traditional leaders, working alongside experts in gender equality and women’s human rights. The effect has been to give security actors new responsibilities and victims/survivors of conflict-related sexual violence new avenues for accountability and action.

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<sup>1</sup> The UN Action network currently consists of the following 26 members: CTED, DPPA, DPO, IOM, ITC, ILO, UN-HABITAT, UNOCHA, OHCHR, OSAPG, OSRSG-CAAC, OSRSG-VAC, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNEP, UNDGC, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODA, UNODC, UN Women, UNOCT, UN Youth Office, WFP, and WHO.

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However, **continued vigilance is needed** to achieve full and effective implementation of legal obligations and political commitments to protect women, girls, men and boys at risk, to promote rights of victims and ensure comprehensive services reach survivors, and to hold perpetrators accountable. Despite the progress made, sexual violence persists in warzones around the world. Impunity remains the rule with justice the rare exception. While sexual violence may be the oldest crime of war, it is not yet a problem we can relegate to the past.

Conflict-related sexual violence is an issue that lays bare the horrors and human costs of war. Its persistence points to a wider set of continuing challenges including disrespect for international humanitarian and human rights law, the challenge of engaging non-State actors, the rise of violent extremism, increasing inequality, mass displacement, and the proliferation of arms. The continuously evolving nature of conflict requires the international community to identify innovative strategies not only to respond to sexual violence, but ultimately to prevent it. Having once been downplayed as “an inevitable byproduct of war” and mere “collateral damage”, it is now understood that sexual violence is a **preventable part of the repertoire of conflict, coercion, political repression, violent extremism, and trafficking**, and is **often deliberately employed as a tactic of war, torture, terrorism, ethnic cleansing and genocide**. This event will therefore invite stakeholders to reflect on what more can be done, early and collectively, to **prevent and deter** these graves crimes.

## **Overall Aim:**

The commemoration of the fifteen-year anniversary of the mandate provides a critical opportunity to **take stock of progress, challenges and change, mobilize political and financial support and set the stage for the next phase of concerted efforts** to – once and for all – consign conflict-related sexual violence to the annals of history. The commemoration aims to **review the significant normative, institutional and operational impact** made over the past years, to **deepen understanding of the factors that have enabled or constrained progress**, and to **build consensus for an ambitious way forward**. It will provide a chance to showcase where the mandate and its allies have made a difference and to reflect on ways to magnify this positive impact, as well as to draw attention to persistent gaps in implementation, enforcement and compliance in order to define priorities for the next decade.

The event will also provide scope for considering linkages with broader women’s rights, peace, disarmament and development frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs/Agenda 2030) to address long-standing and structural **root causes** of conflict-related sexual violence.

A critical function of the mandate since its inception in 2009 has been to **amplify the voices of survivors and bridge their perspectives and recommendations to policy-making bodies** and the donor and diplomatic community. This event will provide a platform for survivors and



activists working on the frontlines to speak out, and for the international community to respond to their plight.

## **Programme:**

- Welcoming and opening remarks by Ms. Pramila Patten, Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict;
- Video remarks by Ms. Amina Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General;
- Keynote remarks by Ms. Hillary Clinton, 67th United States Secretary of State and former First Lady;
- Remarks by Ms. Denise Nyakeru Tshisekedi, the First Lady of the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- Remarks by co-sponsors: Norway, Sierra Leone, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America;
- Screening of a **documentary** illustrating the evolution of the mandate on CRSV over the past 15 years;
- **“Survivors’ Hearing”** with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence from several past and current conflicts **to speak of their experiences at United Nations Headquarters** before an audience comprised of Member States, donors, civil society partners, academics, UN entities, and the media;
- Video remarks by Dr. Denis Mukwege, 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate;
- Interventions by UNFPA, UNODA, UNODC, UN Women and WFP;
- Dialogue with investigators and national prosecutors from various conflict-affected countries on emblematic cases on conflict-related sexual violence;
- Opportunity for interventions and remarks by UN Member States.

## **Objectives & Outcomes:**

- Provide a platform for leading **policy-makers, practitioners, activists, survivors and academics to share cutting-edge research and insights** on key aspects of this evolving



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agenda, such as overcoming stigma; psychosocial support and mental health care in the context of a survivor-centered approach; justice, accountability and reparations; the plight and rights of children born of wartime rape; sexual violence as a tactic of terrorism and political repression; and sexual violence in the context of human trafficking including to fund and fuel the operations of transnational criminal, armed and terrorist groups.

- Encourage Member States, including members of the UN Security Council, representatives of UN Regional Groups and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, youth delegates, UN entities and civil society representatives to make interventions highlighting their contributions to this agenda, **share good practices and lessons learnt**, and **pledge renewed political and financial support to the next phase of the mandate**.
- Help to shape, and give momentum to a **forward-looking Agenda for Action**, which will set the stage for the coming years.

## **Participants & Target Audience:**

Full realization of the aims of Security Council resolution 1888 (2009) will require the strategic coordination of efforts by a range of informed policy-makers and implementing partners. The event will therefore bring together representatives from **Governments, the UN system, NGOs and academics** for a day of commemoration, reflection and renewed commitment. Participation at the level of Permanent Representative or Deputy Permanent Representative is encouraged.

The event is planned to coincide with the **week of the annual Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)**, to be chaired by the Confederation of Switzerland as President of the Security Council. Ministers, experts, civil society representatives and UN officials who will be in New York for this Open Debate are encouraged to attend the anniversary commemoration.

## **Media:**

The event will be **webcast live** on UN Web TV (<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1q/k1q98uvrrs>) and archived on the website of the Office of the SRSG-SVC ([www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict](http://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict)). It is **open to UN-accredited media**.

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The event will also be promoted through a **social media campaign** and participants are welcome to cross-promote key messages, as well as to post about the event on their social media accounts using the hashtag **#EndRapeInWar** and tagging the SRSG's Office (X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube: @endrapeinwar).