



## Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

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*Women, Peace and Security: Where are we now on 1325?*

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### Introduction and context

Thank you to UNFPA for this opportunity to give my *first* presentation as the United Nations' *first* Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

It's fitting that this comes as part of the 54<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women, marking the 15-year anniversary of the *Beijing Platform for Action*. My mandate – to drive and empower efforts across the UN system to end the scourge of sexual violence – shows we are *still in pursuit of the Beijing Platform*. It was this historic document – framed by the women's movement – that provided the precedent for Security Council resolution 1820 – the resolution that condemned sexual violence as a tactic of war and impediment to peacebuilding.

The *Beijing Platform* sounded the alarm, stating: "Parties to conflict often rape women with impunity, sometimes using systematic rape as a tactic of war and terrorism". When governments were negotiating 1820, they looked to this language. They built the resolution on the ground broken by women at Beijing. Today, the notion of sexual violence as a "tactic of war" has travelled from Beijing to the world's paramount peace and security body here in New York – the UN Security Council.

Of course, the policy consensus on sexual violence as a security issue also reaffirms the foundational resolution, 1325. I'm honored to share this panel with experts engaged in making that resolution a reality.

It's critical to connect the dots. Re-thinking sexual violence as integral to the waging of *war*, gives renewed impetus to the inclusion of women and their experiences in the building of *peace*. Sexual violence prevents the very participation in public life that 1325 identified a decade ago as essential to durable peace. In other words: strategies to *protect women* are also strategies to *protect women's participation*. If women are unable to safely access fields, marketplaces, water-

points or polling booths, if girls are unable to safely get to school, then socio-economic recovery will be stalled.

In my view, *women's security is the best measure of national security*. 1820 acknowledges this. It affirms that steps to prevent and address sexual violence, are also steps to maintain peace and security. In a way, 1820 is itself an answer to the question posed by this panel. While important progress has been made on 1325, sexual violence has continued – *even escalated*. 1820 represents a sharpened response to a pillar of 1325 that remains *woefully weak*.

I'd like to discuss some of the collective challenges we face in that regard, and my strategic agenda for action.

### **The challenge of combating conflict-related sexual violence**

From DRC to Haiti, from Bosnia to Liberia, rape has been *slowest* to register on the security radar, and *lowest* on the hierarchy of war-time horrors. It has been called “history’s greatest silence” and the “world’s least condemned war crime”.

This is no accident. The process of socialization into gender roles includes *blaming and shaming* women for the violence inflicted upon them. Accordingly, rape is the only crime for which a community tends to stigmatize the *victim*, rather than the *perpetrator*. Progress on 1325 and 1820 will be propelled by complementary work on women’s rights – on the root causes of women’s dehumanization, and the sense of entitlement that emboldens perpetrators. Again, this recalls the rallying-cry of Beijing: “*women's rights are human rights*”. This is everybody’s business.

Yet sexual violence has been treated as a private *tragedy*, rather than a *tactic*. Prevailing opinion would have us believe that what happens in a “private hut” has nothing to do with security. That rape is “cultural”. That women’s suffering is part of war’s “collateral damage”. In fact, *every rape – even in the midst of war – is a crime that can be prevented*. Sexual violence is either commanded, condoned or condemned. That is a *choice* made by those in power.

The UN Secretary-General has called it “efficient brutality” – meaning there is *method* in the *madness*. A raped woman or girl becomes a message to her people: flee or else. In this way, it destroys not only *people*, but their *sense of being a people*. By turning victims into outcasts, it shreds the social fabric.

Our enemy is the self-serving myth that rape is inevitable. This protects the perpetrators, shields their commanders, and allows world leaders to shrug off sexual violence as the random acts of a few renegades. Resolution 1820 challenges us to “debunk the myths” that fuel sexual violence.

My message to the guardians of global public opinion and global peace and security is clear: *rape is never inevitable*. It is a crime of concern to the international community.

The UN estimates that over 200,000 women have been raped during 12 years of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. One of the women behind this mind-numbing figure is 21-year-old Lumo Sinai – gang-raped so violently she may never bear children. Rejected by her fiancé, rejected by her family, she waits, alone, for reconstructive surgery that may never come. Women like Lumo are living proof of our failure to protect. They are the reason I am here today. Together with you all.

My first field visit as Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict will be to the DRC next month. I want to hear first-hand what solutions will work in a country that has been called the “epicenter” of this crisis.

### **Strategic vision and 5-point agenda**

I have no illusions about the complexity of this challenge. But, as I’ve said before, for me it is not “mission impossible”, but “mission irresistible”. As an independent advocate, my aim is to give greater prominence in public debate to sexual violence as part of the repertoire of conflict and political coercion – most recently witnessed in Guinea, where appalling public rapes were caught on cell-phone cameras.

Strong partnerships – including with civil society and the research community – are essential for evidence-based advocacy and informed interventions. I see my diplomatic efforts as a way to facilitate the work of colleagues on the frontlines. In short: I will not be in the business of “business-as-usual”. We need faster forward motion and greater political momentum.

So, what is my 5-point agenda?

**Firstly, ending impunity: justice for survivors, consequences for perpetrators, deterrence for the future.** For war-affected women, *justice delayed is more than justice denied – it is terror continued*. Top priority is pushing back against the vicious cycle of impunity. I will encourage governments to draw upon the technical expertise of a soon-to-be created “Team of Experts on the Rule of Law”. They will stand ready for rapid deployment to situations where rape continues unchecked. I will work with community leaders to emphasize that there are no “rape cultures”, only cultures of impunity. As the *Beijing Declaration* made clear: “No State may refer to national customs as an excuse for not guaranteeing all individuals human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

This leads to my **second point: protect and empower war-affected women and girls.** Protection and empowerment are *twin pillars* of resolutions 1325 and 1820. We are not just protecting women *from* violence, but protecting them *to* become agents of change. In Liberia, women took it upon themselves to disarm rebels and bring them to the peace table. In addition to helping the victims, we must *help ensure there are no more victims*. A new cadre of professionals known as “Women Protection Advisers” will build gender competence into armed, security and peacekeeping forces. Their skill-set will combine military or police credentials with an understanding of gender analysis and women’s rights. By bringing these areas into closer alignment, prevention is possible. In Darfur, firewood patrols and the construction of fuel-efficient stoves by peacekeepers, including women, have reduced the number of rapes – even in the face of limited resources.

**Third, strengthen political commitment and leadership.** My years of experience in government and the EU have convinced me that *where there’s a political will, there’s a way*. To put it bluntly: I will immediately pick-up the phone and knock on doors to remind world leaders to take the action they have pledged. My office is not an institutional fix to a political problem. Nor is 1820 an end in itself. Both are tools for holding policy-makers to account. The *National Action Plans* that other panelists will mention should include elements of 1820, alongside 1325, as I understand Uganda has done.

**Fourth, re-think rape as a tactic of war and terror:** In contemporary conflict, rape *is* the frontline. It is a security issue that requires a security response. This must be *recognized and realized*. I am haunted by the words of a witness, testifying before the Yugoslav Tribunal, who said: “They could, perhaps, explain it to themselves when somebody steals something from them, or even beatings, or some killings...but when the rapes started they lost all hope. Until then they had hope that this war would pass...when the rapes started everybody lost hope, men and women. There was such fear.” 1820 demands the “immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence”. Those who tolerate sexual terror are on notice: they do so in defiance of the Security Council, with its power to impose sanctions, refer cases to international courts, and enact robust enforcement measures. Peace negotiations must address sexual violence early and fully to prevent war-time rape from becoming peacetime reality. Amnesty is not an option for this calibre of crime.

**Finally: harmonize and amplify the response of the international community.** To war-affected women, there is no “1325” or “1820”, no programmes, funds or entities. There is simply “the UN” and we must deliver as one in common cause with governmental and non-governmental partners. To do this, I will harness the efforts of the network, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict. UN Action unites 13 entities behind *one* goal: to end sexual violence during and in the wake of war. UN Action has been working to ensure a more cohesive

response from the UN system, and I look forward to empowering and fronting that effort. We are already assembling benchmarks to track progress and plug programmatic gaps.

### **Concluding remarks**

Ten years into the Women, Peace and Security agenda, we are compelled to ask: *Have we delivered women's peace and security?* As we look back on the promise of the *Beijing Platform*, and the adoption of 1325, we also look forward to a time when women's inclusion in peace and security will be not a *novelty*, but *normality*.

There is a lot we have learnt. We know that peace will not deliver peace for women if rape persists. That law will not deliver justice for women if no reparations are made. And that seats at the table will not guarantee genuine participation after decades of women's exclusion. Our legal and policy frameworks are more sophisticated, less gender-blind. But change must ultimately be felt in the lives of women walking to market in Eastern Congo, collecting firewood outside a camp in Darfur, or lining up to vote in a village of Afghanistan. Their security is the true measure of success. For my part, over the coming two years of my mandate, I hope to mobilize *more resolution, not just more resolutions!* This means political resolve and resources to match the scale and magnitude of sexual violence – *one of the great security challenges of our time*.

Thank you.