



# STOP RAPE NOW

UN ACTION AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

## Security Council Open Meeting on

### “Women, Peace and Security: Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict”

Statement by UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Margot Wallström

New York, 27 April 2010

Check against delivery

Mr. President, members of the Security Council,

I would like to thank you and the Permanent Mission of Japan for this opportunity to address the Security Council, as United Nations’ Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Why should this body, that debates matters of war and peace, debate the security of women?

I am honored to add my voice to the Council’s groundbreaking consideration of that question. I will also share with you a frank assessment of gaps in our efforts to address sexual violence, the challenges I observed on my visit to the DRC, and how my vision and five-point agenda aims to respond. I would like to leave you with two forward-looking recommendations: namely, to give sexual violence *continuous consideration* and to *make prevention top priority*.

From the Trojan War to the nuclear age, rape has existed in symbiotic relationship with armed conflict. And yet, it is a relationship we are just beginning to understand. History has perpetuated the ancient myth of “arms and the man” – prioritizing the plight of soldiers on the frontlines, while relegating women to the sidelines.

This Council, however, has helped redefine the relationship between rape and war – and, more broadly, between women, peace and security. Resolution 1820 was a historic response to a heinous reality. It was a response commensurate with the understanding that conflict-related sexual violence is *collective violence* – aimed to destroy not only people, but *their sense of being a people*.

The complementary efforts of other UN bodies to advance gender equality, development and justice are crucial, and I look forward to working with them as a bridge to the broader UN membership. Yet our approach to rape, in places where peace and order prevail, no more equips us to address systematic rape as a war strategy, than our approach to murder prepares us for genocide. In terms of their *intent, extent and impact*, the crimes are incomparable.

In the wake of World War II, the *UN Charter* was adopted to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”, which “has brought untold sorrow”. But still, the “scourge” of rape continues, and its sorrows are largely left “untold”. “Succeeding generations” continue to be born of rape at gunpoint, and stigmatized as the stepchildren of war. Governments and armed groups that tolerate sexual terror make a mockery of the *UN Charter*, and this Council’s action to enforce it. Those who employ sexual violence to punish, humiliate, terrorize or displace, commit *crimes against the victims*, and *crimes against humanity*.

Sexual violence creates and perpetuates an atmosphere of insecurity. This leads to a drastic decline in the number of girls able to safely attend school and the number of women able to access water points, marketplaces and polling booths. As a biological weapon, it increases the disease burden on a community, including the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. It uproots and fractures families, dissolving community bonds by turning *victims* into *outcasts*. The psychological scars remain beneath the surface of a society and – like any explosive remnant of war – make peace less possible.

Far from being a ‘niche’ issue, sexual violence is part of a larger pattern. The changing nature of conflict is characterized by an increased civilian-combatant interface, which has seen the targeting of populations, and the placing of women and girls at ever greater risk. Rule by rape is used by political and military leaders, to achieve political, military and economic ends. Politically-motivated rape is a disturbing trend witnessed in the wake of Kenya’s contested elections, and more recently, in broad daylight on the streets of Guinea. Such crimes present a security crisis that demands a security response.

So what *is* the response of the UN system – and what is missing?

The UN system is generating proposals for effective monitoring and reporting to identify and plug gaps, measured against performance benchmarks. I would like to brief the Council today on a few critical gaps, to which my vision is intended to respond.

Firstly, the knowledge-base on which we act has been impaired by analytical gaps. Perhaps the most insidious is the notion that rape is an inevitable byproduct of war. Sexual violence and its extreme consequences are not intrinsic to conflict and displacement. Rather, there is a sense that rape leaves the perpetrator without blood on their hands – that it can be put down to “biological need” or the “fog of war”. So we must be clear: mass rape is no more natural, inevitable or acceptable than mass murder. Research reveals variations in the use of war-rape, and situations in which it is rare, so we know it is not a necessary corollary of conflict. The UN has traditionally analyzed sexual violence through a gender, reproductive health and development lens, meaning security factors and actors are often overlooked. But war-time sexual violence is a crime that can be commanded, condoned or condemned. Once we better understand these dynamics, I am convinced that *prevention is within our power*.

However, a range of factors inhibit survivors from coming forward to report: lack of services, shame, low rights-awareness, and high security risks. To inform interventions, we need data that captures trends, early-warning indicators and patterns of attack. While we cannot expect accurate book-keeping on the battlefield, inadequate information-sharing and coordination has meant that sexual violence data remains fragmented and anecdotal. Nonetheless, I would argue, that from the way sexual violence spans history, the burden of proof in war-time should be on those who suggest rape is *not* rampant. When law and order collapses, rape should be automatically included in contingency plans.

A related gap is accountability – the need to put *names* to war’s most complex horrors. History does not repeat itself – *people repeat history*. I therefore welcome the expansion of the “list of shame” on groups that recruit child soldiers to include groups credibly suspected of patterns of sexual violence. The Secretary-General’s second report on 1820, to be compiled by my office and presented at the end of the year, will propose listing criteria, aligned with that developed by the Office of the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict. We cannot arbitrarily cut-off concern for rape victims at age 18. My vision includes tracking the security dimensions of sexual violence by making use of “Women Protection Advisers” as a counterpart in the field.

Another gap is the routine inclusion of sexual violence – against boys and men, as well as women and girls – as part of the protection of civilians. *Ad hoc* methods have been employed, like the firewood patrols in Darfur, but we need to systematize. In June, I will launch, together with DPKO and UNIFEM, *An Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practice* to address conflict-related sexual violence. This document captures promising practice and elements of an effective response.

To see these protection challenges first-hand, I recently visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo – a vast and remarkable nation, where I met resilient and dynamic women. Yet this story is eclipsed by the horror story that Congo remains the “rape capital of the world”. This mars its image and potential for economic growth. While the Congo’s mothers, daughters and sisters *walk in shame*, their rapists *walk free*. Victims are doubly victimized by this injustice. Yet Congo has a robust legal framework and a “zero tolerance” declaration. It also has a *Comprehensive Strategy on Combating Sexual Violence*, jointly owned by the Government and the UN system. The laws must be implemented, and the strategy operationalized. Political leadership is needed right across the spectrum: from the President, the National Assembly and Provincial Governors, to religious and community leaders.

Sexual violence remains a dominant, even escalating, feature of the conflict. The refrain I heard from women across the Kivus was: “*If only it were not for the war...*” Recent reports suggest that 60 percent of victims surveyed in the Kivus were gang-raped by armed men. More than half of these assaults took place in the supposed safety of the family home, at night, often in the presence of the victim’s husband and children. I heard evidence that 4 out of 5 women seeking

care from health centres claim to have been raped by men in uniform. The core of this problem is impunity, and it is *the rule*, rather than *the exception*. Rape victims receive no justice and no reparations. In South Kivu province, there are just 54 magistrates, only 2 of them women. The Congolese people deserve a credible army that can protect them. The uniform should symbolize a service women can *run to*, not *run from*. It should not represent a patchwork of militias, stitched together without a screening process. The FARDC Headquarters bears a sign that reads: *La discipline est la mère des armées*. But discipline must be backed with concrete measures to replace makeshift tents with barracks, improvised attire with uniforms, and implicit license to live off rural populations, with a reliable payment chain.

Similarly, the *Police Nationale Congolaise* lacks practical means to respond to sexual violence. In a context where rape is described as an “epidemic”, the Women and Child Protection Unit in Goma shares one motorbike to go out and apprehend suspects. Violent criminals sit on the back of the bike as they ride to the small shed that serves as a holding station.

Nonetheless, I was inspired by the dedication of members of the police, judicial and hospital staff, NGOs and local authorities. I am also pleased to report progress in MONUC’s practice on the ground. One example is its market-route patrols. At first, very few women followed, but over time, as confidence grew, more and more began to take advantage of these escorts. The improved sense of safety led to improved trade, which has contributed to economic development.

My findings from DRC, coupled with the aforementioned gaps analysis, reaffirm the 5-point priority agenda I have outlined for my mandate: namely, ending impunity; empowering women; mobilizing political leadership; increasing recognition of rape as a tactic and consequence of conflict; and ensuring a more coherent response from the UN system.

Firstly, the reign of impunity must end. This is a critical part of the broader mandate of this Council to shepherd situations from *might to right*, from *rule of war to rule of law*, from *bullets to ballots*. If women continue to suffer sexual violence, it is not because the law is inadequate to protect them, but because it is inadequately enforced. I will work with governments to explore options for drawing upon the technical expertise of a Team of Experts on the rule of law, mandated by resolution 1888.

Secondly, we are not just protecting women from violence, but *empowering* them to become agents of change. A ceasefire is not synonymous with peace for women, if the shooting ceases but rapes continue unchecked.

The third point is mobilizing political leadership. Resolutions are not ends in themselves, but tools in the hands of political leaders. I intend to rally States, UN and regional bodies to *own* this agenda and feel accountable for its success. I will also mobilize non-traditional stakeholders, as sexual violence is not just a “women’s issue”.

Fourth is increasing recognition of rape as a tactic and consequence of conflict. Those who tolerate sexual terror should be on notice that they do so in defiance of the Security Council, with its power to enact enforcement measures. Resolution 1807, imposing a travel ban and asset freeze on individuals in DRC who commit serious violations of international law, including sexual violence, is a powerful example of effective Council action.

The fifth point, coordination, is critical to avoid *gaps* and *overlaps* in UN activities. To this end, I will work through the inter-agency network, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, which has provided strategic support in five integrated mission settings: DRC, Liberia, Sudan (Darfur), Chad and Côte d'Ivoire, helping agencies rise above institutional mandates to "deliver as one". It is encouraging that the Security Council has amplified the call for *Comprehensive Strategies to Combat Sexual Violence* in its mandate renewals for Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan.

The final theme I would like to raise, responds to the most urgent gap: that is, *prevention*. The terms of the debate have shifted: from *reacting* to sexual violence like any other tragedy, to *preventing* sexual violence like any other threat. This means both *helping the victims*, and *helping to ensure there are no more victims*.

My office will prepare an early-warning matrix of risk factors to sound the alarm from the ground up. I look forward to working with a Military Liaison Officer, who can interface with Force Commanders, Ministries of Defense and armed groups to identify patterns of violence.

Our current knowledge comes mainly from the survivors. For too long, it has been considered unpalatable to inquire into the motivations of perpetrators and non-State actors, as if doing so would legitimize their conduct. Understanding perpetrators is the missing piece of the puzzle.

There has been a lot of focus on command responsibility. This is warranted, but we should not ignore the importance of *peer liability*. Peer pressure is a powerful influence in armed groups. In the inverted moral universe of war, violence becomes a virtue and rape a rite of passage. In the words of a former combatant, pleading guilty to charges of repeated rape before the ICTY: "*Our wrongs were so terrible...that we clung to them, and tried to justify them. I tried to be proud of my actions and to think they were the actions of a successful soldier*". I recommend pioneering a "peer education model" on sexual violence prevention.

To go on the offensive against sexual violence will require the Council's *continuous consideration*. Bold language in thematic resolutions must not be lost in translation when it comes to country-level action. Well-framed mandates for MONUC have made a real difference. And I applaud the efforts, during the Council's last mission to the Congo in May 2009, to ensure the 5 army officers blacklisted for sexual violence are brought to justice.

States bear primary responsibility for protecting their citizens from violence. I see my role as helping to build the capacity of governments to meet *their* obligations. Women have no rights, if

those who violate their rights go unpunished. I am haunted by what I heard in the DRC – that women are still not safe, under their own roofs, in their own beds, when night falls. Our aim must be to uphold international law, so that women – even in the war-torn corners of our world – *can sleep under the cover of justice.*

Thank you, Mr. President.