

# UN ACTION

## Against Sexual Violence in Conflict



Welcome to **UN Action's** inaugural newsletter, showcasing some of our current initiatives, members and supporters in the global response to CRSV. **UN Action** is a network of 20 UN entities united in the goal of ending sexual violence during and in the wake of armed conflict.

## UN ACTION PROJECT IN SPOTLIGHT: SOMALIA

**UN Action** supported the Somalia based project, *Leveraging the strength of women in Somalia to mitigate conflict-related sexual violence and prevent violent extremism*, implemented by IOM and UNSOM between April 2020 and March 2021. The project supported the rehabilitation and reintegration of women who were formerly associated with violent extremist groups, many of whom are survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). It provided individualised services such as medical support, referrals and dignity kits (e.g. traditional Somali clothing such as shawls (garbosaar) and headscarves (shalmad)). It also used culturally grounded approaches to assist women recover from trauma, and provided economic empowerment support, ultimately ensuring that these women become active contributors to sustainable peacebuilding in their societies.

The project rapidly adjusted to the COVID-19 pandemic by including preventative health trainings, providing Personal Protective Equipment, and moving to a hybrid in-person and virtual capacity development model for national counterparts, including civil society organisations (CSOs) and the Government of Somalia, to ensure continuity of the programme in the future. Despite slight delays, this hybrid model enhanced opportunities to test new ways of conducting capacity-building and provided an avenue to integrate gender-based violence (GBV) awareness-raising efforts in public health messages, and vice-versa.

The project directly supported over 200 women in Baidoa and Kismayo. By using survivor-centred psychosocial methods, project partners created opportunities for women to explore their identities, establish a sense of belonging within their communities, and build trust with other women. In this safe space, survivors were able, for the first time, to open-up about their traumatic experiences through therapeutic activities, including arts and sports.

Hafso (name changed) is amongst the women who participated in the programme. At the women's centre, she felt she had finally found a safe place to begin healing from her trauma.

**“ I am happy to be enrolled in this rehabilitation programme. I have a chance to build a network and share the secrets and the shame I have been hiding my whole life. This feels good. Here I am not judged. I finally feel as if a burden has been lifted from my shoulders. ”**

Survivors also participated in basic education, business development, and livelihood skills training, adapted to the women's wishes, to enable them to rebuild their lives independently. For example, some of the women chose to pool their money to start a small cooperative in goat-keeping and livestock trade.

*\*Projects such as this one are funded through the CRSV-Multi Partner Trust Fund (MPTF).*



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## DONOR HIGHLIGHT: JAPAN

**UN Action** would like to acknowledge the Government of Japan's unwavering support to the CRSV mandate. With Japan's contributions, **UN Action** most recently funded important initiatives in Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. Funding from Japan also supported the IOM/UNSOm project featured in this newsletter.

In its dedication to the prevention and response to CRSV, Japan has engaged in many different ways. In 2016, Japan hosted a Women's Protection Advisers (WPA) Workshop that brought together the **UN Action** Network members led by DPO, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC), and WPAs from missions around the globe to discuss best practices and lessons learned in supporting survivors of CRSV. Japan has also lent a Junior Professional Officer to the **UN Action** Secretariat to support the Network achieve its ambitious goals.

*In our following newsletters, we are looking forward to featuring our donors who have generously contributed to UN Action projects and initiatives: Sweden, Estonia, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Norway and Japan.*

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## CORE GROUP FEATURE: MARA

**UN Action** progresses its knowledge building and advocacy initiatives through eight working groups ('Core Groups') focused on driving thematic and technical aspects of the CRSV mandate forward. Each newsletter will highlight one of these Core Groups to showcase the important discussions and initiatives happening within the network.

One of these Core Groups focuses on the Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting Arrangements (MARA). It is Chaired by OSRSG-SVC and includes DPO, DPPA, OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR and OSRSG-CAAC. The purpose of the MARA is to ensure the systemic gathering of timely, accurate, reliable and objective information on CRSV, which is then used to promote increased and timely action in the prevention and response to CRSV.

This Core Group is dedicated to leading an assessment of the operationalisation of the MARA since its establishment through Security Council resolution 1960 in 2011. Through this initiative, the Network is collaborating with the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum to assess the MARA and other monitoring and reporting arrangements related to CRSV in various situations of concern. The objective of this exercise is not only to gather best practices and lessons learned on the implementation of CRSV-related monitoring mechanisms but also to inform a much-needed update of the 2011 Provisional Guidance Note on Security Council resolution 1960. The MARA is an important mechanism that is specific to each country in which it is implemented, ensuring coherent and coordinated responses to CRSV at the field and global levels.



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## SWPA IN FOCUS: MS. GHADA SHAWGI, SOMALIA

**“Women are silenced by their fears. It is key to hear the voice of the survivors and to be guided by their needs, interests, and rights”**



Ms. Ghada Shawgi has worked as a Senior Women’s Protection Adviser in Somalia since 2013. Born in Sudan, Ghada’s passion and professional interest in protecting women in conflict situations stems from her experience in her home country and her passion to advance women’s rights and eradicate gender-based violence in conflict and post conflict settings. Ghada has an established legal background and has served as a Gender Advisor for UN Women and UNDP, where she advanced constitutional frameworks, designated policies, and developed a programmatic approach to enhance women’s rights and integrate gender into the justice sector, government policies and programs.

**“ I believe in the agency of women, I believe in the strength of women. I believe women can lead the way forward. The UN is here to support the women’s quest for equality and justice ”**

Ghada has learned from her experience working long-term in Somalia that building back from a conflict is not easy, especially because the security situation is a major challenge for the implementation of peace and security mandates. Conflict affects society as a whole, but girls and women are the most affected because of gender inequality and existing sociocultural norms. In addition, the clan-based system often prevails over the official justice system. Ghada sees the role of civil society in Somalia as the light at the end of the tunnel, thus women-led organisations have a critical role in supporting the women’s agenda; political participation, protection, legal reform, and providing critical services to survivors of CRSV and GBV.

**“Somalia has a vibrant civil society and women-led groups are leading the way forward”**

Ghada called for the **UN Action** Network to support the Joint Communiqué on Prevention of Sexual Violence in Conflict signed between the Government of Somalia and the United Nations in 2013. She emphasised the importance of supporting the Government to fulfill this commitment and develop a second National Action Plan, following lessons learned from the 2014-2017 National Action Plan. Ghada hopes that the international community keeps supporting and highlighting the CRSV agenda. She also emphasised the success of the project funded by **UN Action** in Somalia and added: **“I want to specifically thank the Government of Japan, which supported Somalia with funding to build the capacity of the police and the justice sector for the protection of women.”**

For Ghada, the efforts to eliminate CRSV need to be guided by the experience, interests and needs of survivors through a survivor-centred approach. In this regard, **“Putting the survivors at the heart of our actions, we will be guided by their experiences, and we’ll be in the right direction to get their needs in the heart of everything that we are doing”.**

Crafting at a safe space © UN Photo



Pot Breaking in Somalia ©UN Photo

*IOM Somalia supports the implementation of cultural and art-based activities that positively impact the social cohesion and improve the collective psychosocial wellbeing in Somali communities.*

*Sharerow dance, popular among Somali Bantu community, is common during celebrations and festivals. The dance is accompanied by ululation, drumming, and a narration often conveying messages and stories that are important in the daily lives of Somali people.*



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The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, has been the Chair of the **UN Action** Network since April 2017. UN Action's Strategic Framework is guided by SRSO Patten's vision to ensure that survivors' voices are heard, to bring perpetrators to justice and to shine a light on this underreported crime. During this year's International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict theme around "Building back better: Supporting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in the context of pandemic recovery," the SRSO recognised the threat of Covid-19 in preventative measures and urged the international community to, **'ensure that the voices and choices of survivors of sexual violence are integrated into national, regional and global pandemic recovery plans'**.

## 7<sup>th</sup> OFFICIAL OBSERVANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

The General Assembly resolution of 2015 ([A/RES/69/293](#)) proclaimed 19 June as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. This year's titular event was co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations, the OSRSG-SVC and the Office of the SRSO for Children and Armed Conflict. Member States, UN entities and civil society all convened to stand in solidarity with survivors of CRSV and those working to support them on the frontlines during the COVID-19 pandemic. The recorded webcast can be found on [UN Web TV](#). Highlights include:

Her Excellency the First Lady of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Global Champion for the Fight Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Denise Nyakeru, emphasised DRC's National Strategy to fight GBV and its zero-tolerance policy against all forms of violence, **"We must do everything to stop this scourge. It is about our dignity. It is about the future of our nations, that of all humanity"**.

SRSO Patten previewed the upcoming launch of a digital book entitled "In Their Own Words: Voices of Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Service Providers", a compilation of testimonies from survivors and service providers.

The OSRSG-SVC launched The Model Legislative Provisions and Guidance on the Investigation and Prosecution on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, a new tool to assist states seeking to enact or amend laws on CRSV.

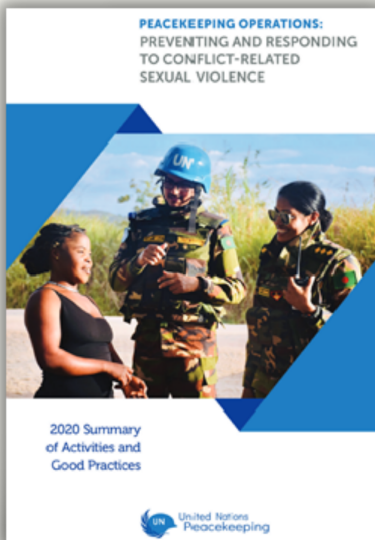
A Framework of Cooperation was signed between the OSRSG-SVC and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Ms. Ekhlal Bajoo, a Yazidi CRSV survivor, activist and contributor to the digital book, called for solidarity behind survivors. She said: **"Today I believe in you and today you are the hope of all those oppressed. (...) The fate of all survivors is in your hands."**

The Executive Director of the UNFPA, an active member of UN Action, Dr. Natalia Kanem, delivered remarks emphasising the need to centre survivors at the heart of any responses to CRSV.



## UN ACTION MEMBER HIGHLIGHT: DPO



The UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) was one of the ten members of the **UN Action** Network when it was first formed in 2007 and has been an energetic member of the Network since. DPO notably led the development of the first Policy and Handbook for UN Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to CRSV in partnership with DPPA, OHCHR, and the OSRSG-SVC, both released in 2020. These guidance materials place preventing and responding to CRSV as a priority for field missions and a mission-wide responsibility. DPO is represented by Chloe Silvestre from the CRSV Team, Policy and Best Practices Service, Division of Policy, Evaluation, and Training. This team is dedicated to supporting peace operations in implementing and strengthening the delivery of the CRSV mandate, including through specialised advice to SWPAs and by facilitating inter-mission learning. [Click here](#) to read more on how peacekeeping missions fight CRSV.

From 2009-2019, the **UN Action** – MPTF supported DPO's initiatives to support the deployment of S/WPAs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire and South Sudan.

Currently, DPO is involved in five different **UN Action** Core Groups, including the Resource Management Committee and actively contributing to the Network's assessment of the operationalisation of the MARA on CRSV.



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