



Ukraine: UN High Level Officials urge the swift investigation of sexual violence allegations and call for strengthened measures to protect women and girls

This statement is attributable to Ms. Pramila Patten, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and Ms. Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women.

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NEW YORK (07 April 2022) – We are deeply shocked by the images of civilians killed in Bucha and other localities, and gravely concerned about mounting allegations of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls in the context of the war in Ukraine. We echo the UN Secretary-General in his calls for the war in Ukraine to stop- now. Such wars and related displacement heighten risks of all forms of sexual violence including trafficking in persons, impacting women and girls disproportionately. Rigorous investigation of allegations of sexual violence must be conducted to ensure justice and accountability, as a central aspect of deterrence and prevention of such crimes. It is vital that all efforts are made to ensure protection and the provision of life-saving and recovery services for survivors of sexual violence. While security and access restrictions continue to pose significant challenges for the verification of information by the United Nations, this should not paralyse urgent and immediate action to put in place prevention and response measures.

The allegations of sexual violence raise serious questions about possible war crimes. International humanitarian and human rights law, which categorically prohibit rape and all forms of sexual violence and inhumane treatment, must be fully complied with by all parties to the conflict. Orders should be immediately issued through their respective chains of command prohibiting rape and other forms of sexual violence, with concrete, timebound preventive measures as explicitly outlined in Security Council resolutions 2106 and 2467.

To respond to the urgent needs of affected populations, the United Nations is bolstering protection and response services for victims and survivors of sexual violence, including for their sexual and reproductive health needs. These services are being designed and carried out in collaboration with Ukrainian civil society, in particular with local women's organizations. All responses must be survivor-centred, ensuring that the safety and well-being of survivors are the paramount consideration.

We commend and express our appreciation for the countries receiving and hosting refugees and encourage them to ensure that comprehensive services are available for survivors of sexual violence. Member States and civil society can count on our full support in their efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence, as well as in fulfilling their obligations to securing justice for survivors.

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