

Twenty-Four UN entities urge immediate action to protect women and girls from sexual violence in and around IDP camps in eastern DRC

Press Statement: For Immediate Release

New York, 13 July 2023 - The 24 UN entities comprising the UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict Network - led by the UN Special Representative Pramila Patten – join the Special Representative’s [call](#) to urge immediate action to protect women and girls and prevent the use of sexual violence in and around internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The UN Action Network is deeply concerned about the dramatic increase in recorded cases of sexual violence in eastern DRC and the targeting of women and girls by armed men in and around IDP camps as they search for food, water and firewood. There are also reports of about 1,000 locations in Goma, North Kivu where displaced women and girls are forced to engage in survival sex, including in IDP sites. A related concern is the risk that other serious crimes like human trafficking become prevalent in the context of armed conflict, such as sexual exploitation, enslavement, and forced marriage; and the recruitment and use of children, including in combat.

The DRC Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) has reported a 78% increase in survivors seeking GBV response services in North Kivu from 2021 to 2022. In only the first three months of this year, 10,339 survivors in North Kivu, of whom 66% were raped, have sought GBV services. Over the same period, 5,292 survivors have sought similar services in Ituri and 4,582 in South Kivu. Such violations may amount to atrocity crimes. In a context of high insecurity and displacement, as well as under-reporting due to fear of stigma and shame, these figures are merely a snapshot, with many more survivors who could not or have not yet been able to seek care. The UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC is liaising with partners and other UN actors in the country to document the allegations and facilitate access to support survivors.

We stress the need for all parties to conflict in the DRC to put in place rigorous measures to ensure the immediate cessation of, and accountability for, all forms of sexual violence. We further call on the Government of the DRC to fully implement the [Joint Communiqué on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#) and its [Addendum](#), as well as the 2012 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children.

IDP camps must be secured by national and local authorities in accordance with their primary obligation to protect civilians under international humanitarian law and in a manner that strictly adheres to international human rights law. In all prevention efforts, we call on the Government to use and implement the [Framework for the Prevention of CRSV](#), developed by the UN Action Network.

It is vital that women and girls are not placed at further risk of sexual violence. Therefore, we strongly encourage the Government of the DRC to expedite the implementation of its decree to close brothels used for sexual slavery, including the 145 brothels identified, of which 67 are in the IDP sites in Karisimbi and Goma. Such actions include the immediate closure of all brothels, often referred to locally as maisons de tolérance, and adherence to its commitments to strengthen the safeguarding of at-risk communities.

Survivors need comprehensive, survivor-centred and multisectoral services, including medical, psychosocial, legal and socio-economic reintegration support. We urge the Government to immediately implement its intention to establish integrated centres to provide multisectoral assistance to survivors of GBV, including CRSV. Furthermore, the Government

of the DRC must provide unimpeded access for humanitarian actors to protect and respond to survivors' needs, particularly those of women, children and other marginalised groups.

UN Action calls on the Government of the DRC to take necessary measures to end impunity and reinforce access to justice for CRSV survivors by identifying and holding perpetrators accountable, regardless of the perpetrator's rank or affiliation. Such efforts would ensure that perpetrators do not continue committing sexual violence without fear of being held accountable. In this regard, we encourage the Government to enhance the capacity of the judicial system and invest the necessary resources to ensure survivors can access justice, including accompanying measures, and reparations.

We call on the donor community to allocate adequate funding commensurate with the urgent and growing needs of the crisis, including to UN Action's dedicated Multi-Partner Trust Fund. Such resources will enable better protection, and allow the UN and its partners to respond more rapidly, and provide at-scale immediate life-saving GBV multisectoral response services to survivors of CRSV, those at risk, and survivors of other forms of GBV.

We stand ready to support authorities in upholding their commitments to the prevention and response of CRSV in all forms, including through conflict prevention, humanitarian response, disarmament, peace-making and peacebuilding efforts – all of which should centre women's leadership and women-led organisations.

The DRC is among the situations of concern that will be discussed at the Security Council Open Debate on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence on 14 July 2023 ([S/2023/413](#)). The UN Action Network reiterates its commitment to support all actors towards ending the scourge of CRSV in the DRC and wherever else it occurs, and to supporting survivors.

Note to Editors:

UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict unites the efforts of CTED, DPO, DPPA, ILO, IOM, ITC, OCHA, OHCHR, OSAPG, OSGEY, OSRSG-CAAC, OSRSG-VAC, UNAIDS, UNDGC, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOCT, UNODA, UNODC, UN Women and WHO in preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. The network is chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. UN Action's initiatives are funded through the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Multi-Partner Trust Fund (CRSV-MPTF).

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