

Remarks of SRSG-SVC Pramila Patten
Security Council Open Debate on CRSV
“Identifying Innovative Strategies to Ensure Access to Life-Saving Services and Protection for Survivors of Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones”
10.00am, 19th August 2025

Your Excellency, Ambassador Eloy Alfaro de Alba, Permanent Representative of Panama to the United Nations,

Ms. Ikhlass Ahmed, Founder and Coordinator of the Darfur Advocacy Group,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council:

One morning, a young woman, a recent graduate in International Relations, boarded a bus to collect her diploma in Khartoum. By the end of that day, her life, as she knew it, was over. Dragged from the bus, she was gang-raped at gunpoint by four members of the RSF, and left in a dark alley. The next morning, when she regained consciousness, she boarded the first bus she saw, and ended up in **Port Sudan**. Later, when she realized she was pregnant, she knew she could never return home to face her family. When I met her, a few months ago in Port Sudan, she was struggling to care for her baby and to heal from her trauma. *No words* can give that young woman back her future or secure the future of her child. *No words* can make that daily bus ride, through a warzone, safe for countless other women and girls.

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Today’s meeting is *rightly focused* on **identifying strategies to support survivors in conflict zones, where lifesaving services are least accessible at the very moment they are needed most**. I sincerely thank and commend **Panama** for convening this critical debate.

As we meet here, in this chamber, which has *shaped so many chapters of history, something fundamental is being quietly eroded beneath our feet. Shelters for survivors are being shuttered, medical supplies for rape victims are running out, peacekeeping missions are drawing down, and clinics are closing their doors*. At the same time, *the doors of this chamber are slowly being closed to survivors and civil society* due to dwindling resources, travel restrictions, and a rising risk of reprisals.

Let us pause to ask the question: *What are the humanitarian aid cuts and reversals costing us? How do we measure it? In line items on a budget?*

Or in lives, dignity and trust in this Council and the peace it is meant to preserve? Can we afford to undercut multilateral cooperation at a time when militarism is on the march and the clock is being turned back on women's rights? The price-tag will be more chaos and hostility, erasing decades of development, and fanning the flames of future conflict.

*I wish I could say that the members of this Council will stand united in preserving the progress made by this mandate over the past **15 years**. I wish I could say that today's debate will demonstrate to survivors the depth of our collective concern and the extent of our political courage.*

Yet, even as *needs are mounting*, humanitarian assistance is being slashed. Women's frontline organizations are going from *underfunded to unfunded*. We are told there is no money for lifesaving aid, even as military expenditure soars, and **the world spends more in 24 hours on arms than it does in a year on addressing gender-based violence in conflict**. We are told it is a question of competing priorities. So, *what is it that takes precedence over the safety and rights of civilians? What future do we expect to build on the broken bodies and broken dreams of abused women and girls?*

Right now, in **eastern DRC**, clinics are being forced to turn away survivors for a lack of basic post-rape care. In **South Sudan**, women returning home from displacement camps are in desperate need of assistance to rebuild their *lives and livelihoods*. In **Sudan, Ukraine, northern Ethiopia, and Gaza**, healthcare systems have been decimated, and humanitarian organizations forced to do *more and more with less and less and less*.

It is **eighty years** since the adoption of the *UN Charter*, which affirmed the equal rights of men and women, and a **quarter of a century** since the advent of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which explicitly linked gender equality with the pursuit of peace. Yet, **instead of defending transformative progress, we are defunding lifesaving programs**.

*I wish I could say that every member of this Council will use their influence to be a global force for good: to silence the guns, amplify the voices of women, and foster the conditions of equality and inclusion that are vital to stability and peace. I wish I could say that we will rise above denial and deflection, above politicization and recriminations, to take responsibility for the human suffering inflicted on our watch, and to stand with survivors and service-providers on the right side of history. I wish*

*I could say that the donor and diplomatic community will uphold its values and hold the line on funding for protection and assistance. But we shall see.*

If we are serious about peace, we must fund the institutions that make peace possible. If we are serious about security, we must reaffirm the Rule of Law, and hold accountable those who *commit, command, or condone grave violations*, including the atrocity crime of conflict-related sexual violence. Preventing and addressing this scourge is **no longer merely an aspiration – it is a binding obligation that must be respected, implemented and enforced.**

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Excellencies,

There are many ***unseen faces behind the facts and figures presented in the report before us today.*** Each of them *holds a mirror up to our own moral responsibility.*

Picture the young **Congolese** woman who was gang-raped by members of a Mai-Mai militia in retaliation for speaking out against sexual violence, then forced to flee her home under threat of death, even as her assailants walk free.

Think of the survivor of sexual violence in detention in **Myanmar** who described her struggle to take care of a younger detainee who was overwhelmed by shame and trauma after being sexually abused.

Reflect on the plight of a woman in **Afghanistan** who was forcibly returned to a man she had been made to marry, in accordance with the ruling of a *de facto* court – *in a country where the body of a woman has become a prison without bars.*

We often speak of “survivors”, but *let us not forget* the women in **Darfur** who have committed suicide, rather than face the near-certainty of rape by armed men. *Let us not forget* that the *threat, terror and torment* of wartime sexual violence is something that ***many do not survive.*** We have documented cases of family members being murdered for defending their loved ones, such as the **Sudanese man** killed by the RSF for resisting their attempt to rape his niece. We have documented cases of women being killed after rape, with a *level of cruelty beyond comprehension.*

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For this, and other reasons – primarily the lack of access to services and safe reporting channels – the annual report *can never paint a complete picture*. The data we are able to present remains a *chronic undercount*, reflecting cases verified by the United Nations, rather than the scale and magnitude of actual incidents.

In the course of **2024**, more than **4,600 cases** of conflict-related sexual violence, including as a tactic of war, torture, terror and political repression, were documented, marking a staggering **25 percent increase** from **2023**, which was itself a **50 percent increase** from the previous year. The increase in cases reflects the widening scope of warfare globally. The report now spans **21 situations of concern**, with the highest number of cases being recorded in the **Central African Republic**, the **DRC**, **Haiti**, **Somalia**, and **South Sudan**.

Every year, we note the disproportionate impact on women and girls, who consistently account for **over 90 percent** of verified cases (**92 percent** this year). The report records violations against victims ranging in age from **just one to 75 years**, as well as against persons with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities, racial and ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities. Sexual violence against children increased by a shocking **35 percent** over the past year, with incidents of gang-rape rising dramatically, *inflicting enduring, generational harm*.

This year's report *raises the alarm about several striking trends*:

- Firstly, **displaced and refugee women and girls** continue to be exposed to heightened risks of sexual violence, which also inhibit safe return.
- Second, **food insecurity** is increasing the risk of exposure to sexual violence and exploitation, as humanitarian access is curtailed or blocked by belligerent parties. The unprecedented level of attacks on humanitarian workers has hampered access to lifesaving support.
- Third, the accelerated **drawdowns and transitions of UN peace operations** have diminished the capacity of the UN system to reach and support survivors, notably in **Mali**, **Sudan** and the **DRC**. Operational continuity must be maintained through all configurations of the UN country presence, including through the deployment of **Women Protection Advisers**, currently **present in less than half of the countries we cover**.
- Fourth, **non-State armed groups**, including UN-designated **terrorist groups**, continue to use sexual violence to consolidate their control over territory and lucrative natural resources, and to

incentivize the recruitment of fighters. This tactic strengthens violent extremist groups, criminal networks and spoilers to the peace, including through abduction and trafficking as **part of a political economy that turns pain into profit.**

- Fifth, the **proliferation of small arms and light weapons** continues to fuel conflict-related sexual violence. UN data indicates that firearms are used in **70-90 percent** of recorded cases, despite the *Arms Trade Treaty* requiring States Parties to halt the transfer of weapons to actors implicated in gender-based violence. In **Haiti**, where **the rule of the gang, and the rule of the gun, have replaced the rule of law**, rape and gang-rape are rampant.
- Finally, patterns of conflict-related sexual violence persist in both **formal and informal detention settings**, including against Prisoners of War, as a method of torture to humiliate and intimidate, in order to extract information. This has been documented in **Myanmar, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Yemen and Ukraine**, as well as against men, boys and migrants in **Libya**.

This year's report **lists 63 parties** credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of sexual violence in situations of conflict on the Security Council's agenda, with **new listings in the DRC, Libya, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.**

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Against this backdrop, my mandate pursues **three main lines of response**, namely: fostering compliance by parties; enhancing service-delivery; and strengthening safeguards against impunity.

In terms of **compliance**, my mandate has repeatedly called for greater coherence between the list of parties in the annex to the annual report and the designation of individuals and entities by **sanctions regimes** for targeted and graduated measures. The report and list are **tools for engagement to leverage compliance, protection and behavioural change**, and to **ensure that policies of zero tolerance are not met with zero consequences.** Conflict-related sexual violence is explicitly reflected in the designation criteria of **nine sanctions regimes**, resulting in **some 30 listings**, which **sends a powerful political signal.** This mandate has **effectively leveraged the credible threat of sanctions and accountability measures to secure the release of women and girls abducted and held in military bases, or by armed groups, in South Sudan, the DRC, and elsewhere.** As part of its operational methodology, my mandate has **signed more than a dozen Joint Communiqués and**

Frameworks of Cooperation with parties to armed conflict, most recently with the Government of **Sudan**, to enhance security sector reform, protection, and assistance.

Survivor-centered, multisectoral services are not a “soft issue”, but rather the *ultimate expression of political will*. The interagency coordination network, **UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict**, which I Chair, has been *truly transformative* in bringing these issues into focus through advocacy, knowledge-building, and joint, catalytic operations in the field. Through more than **60** life-changing projects, spanning **18** conflicts, UN Action has reached **thousands of survivors across Ukraine, the DRC, Mali, South Sudan, Darfur, Somalia, and elsewhere**.

UN Action has pioneered **innovative strategies** that move beyond reactive measures to activate early-warning systems and mitigate risk, *shifting social stigma, strengthening solidarity networks, and supporting reintegration*. These projects have harnessed **digital technology**, for safe and confidential referrals, as well as making use of **mobile clinics** to reach survivors in remote and volatile regions. UN Action has collated best practices and lessons learnt into a **unique global knowledge hub**, which serves as an *evidence-base for effective solutions*.

In terms of **accountability**, including as a form of deterrence, my **Team of Experts on the Rule of Law** has supported legislative reform, trained law enforcement officials in trauma-informed investigation and prosecution, and ensured that conflict-related sexual violence is addressed in transitional justice processes. Signs of hope are evident in **Colombia**, where former commanders have been indicted for war crimes including sexual violence, and in the **DRC**, where I recently supported the launch of a strategy to implement the law on reparations for survivors.

Yet, the pace of justice is often *painfully slow*. The brave Maya Achi women of **Guatemala** fought for *four decades* to have their *day in court*. In May of this year, a verdict was finally handed down for sexual violence against indigenous communities as a crime against humanity committed during the civil war of the **1980s**. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, an estimated **20-50,000** civilians were victims of wartime sexual violence, yet **30 years on**, just **1,000** have been officially registered as eligible to receive redress. As the report notes, research published in **2024** found that **86 percent** of survivors of sexual violence in **Kosovo** continued to suffer post-traumatic stress **25 years** after the end of the conflict.

A ***continuum of care*** is therefore needed *long after the guns fall silent*, from the emergency medical response, to justice and redress. After all, wars end not on maps or in meeting rooms, but in the homes, streets and minds of those affected. This is the approach of my mandate and its operational arms, supported by our **CRSV Multi-Partner Trust Fund**, which aligns financial support behind technical expertise, for high-impact interventions. *There is simply no more efficient way to fund this work.* Regrettably, ***demand far outstrips supply***. At this moment of backlash, **any failure to sustain investment, any backtracking on established norms, or any unraveling of the existing architecture, would not only betray the survivors, but further embolden the perpetrators.**

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Excellencies,

The ***paradigm shift and bold arc of progress*** this Council set in motion through the establishment of my mandate marked a *historic turning point in the global recognition of the gravity of wartime rape*. Having long been *underreported, under-resourced, and overlooked*, wartime sexual violence is *now increasingly addressed in security policy*, including mediation processes, peacekeeping mandates, sanctions citations, and transitional justice, ensuring more comprehensive solutions.

Once *lost to history*, these crimes are now *publicly recorded for posterity*. It has been made clear that sexual violence is *preventable, not inevitable*; a *crime of war*, not merely a *byproduct* or form of *collateral damage*, like a stray bullet or bomb that misses its target. It is now clear that victims of sexual violence are not simply “*caught in the crossfire*” – their identities, bodies, health and political agency are *actively targeted*.

How we meet this moment of multi-crisis is the *true test of our resolve*. **While political dynamics and funding decisions may vary, the laws, rights, needs and mandate remain. And we must remain steadfast to save succeeding generations from this scourge.**

Yazidi sexual violence survivor, now Nobel Laureate, Nadia Murad wrote: “***I want to be the last girl with a story like mine***”. How many more “*last girls*” must be torn from their families, trafficked into sexual slavery, and scarred by the senseless brutality of war, before we take decisive action? How many “*last girls*” must address this Council before their calls

to action are *heard and heeded* and we end – *once and for all* – the ancient trilogy of wartime terror: looting, pillage and rape.

Today, we have **robust normative frameworks**, we have the **right institutional architecture**, and we have **enhanced our operational reach and impact**. *More than ever before*, we know *what works* and should be taken to scale. We have the solemn promise of this Council expressed in **no less than six specific resolutions**. We now need the *political resolve and resources to make them real* – for every “*last girl*”, for every woman who boards a bus to what should be a brighter future, for every woman who risks her life to raise her voice and speak truth to power wielded at the point of a gun. Over the **next 15 years**, our success will be measured by how effectively we **close protection, assistance, and accountability gaps**.

To the survivors and frontline responders, who keep showing up – even *unpaid and unprotected* – I want to say to you directly: *we see your courage, we hear your voices, and we will fortify your efforts*. Even after the horrors and heartache I have witnessed during eight years in this mandate, I remain hopeful. Survivors and activists remain resilient and continue to have faith in this Organization, in the mission of this Council, and in the rules-based international order.

*We hope you will prove us right.*

Thank you.

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