

UNGA81 HIGH-LEVEL SIDE EVENT

INACTION IS NOT AN OPTION

From Knowledge to Prevention:
The UN Action Approach to Addressing CRSV

22 September 2026 | 13:15-14:30 EDT

Conference Room 11, United Nations Headquarters
New York, USA



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in Conflict to explore how rigorous
knowledge shapes safer futures for
survivors and communities, in-person or
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STOP RAPE NOW
UN ACTION AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

**Statement of SRSG Patten, Chair of UN Action Network
“Inaction Is Not An Option: From Knowledge to Prevention –
The UN Action Approach to Addressing CRSV”**

**Introductory remarks: How knowledge shapes prevention,
protection and peacebuilding, on the occasion of the launch of
the UN Action Toolkit to Support a Survivor-Centred
Approach to Preventing and Addressing CRSV**

**UNGA81 HLW High-level side-event, 22nd September 2026
13.15-14.30 EDT, CR 11, UNHQ**

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Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues:

Throughout the history of warfare, sexual violence – *more than any other atrocity* – has been **routinely dismissed as inevitable**. The result has been *centuries of silencing and sidelining* the experiences of survivors. By treating this violence as inevitable, *inaction and indifference* became inevitable as well.

In **2007**, when UN Action launched its signature *Stop Rape Now* campaign, it called for a **paradigm shift**. It *debunked the myth of inevitability*, which *shielded perpetrators, normalized sexual violence, and reduced survivors to the ‘unavoidable collateral damage of war’*. It called, instead, for conflict-related sexual violence to be elevated onto the international peace and security agenda, as a **threat that is preventable, not inevitable**, and for which *inaction is not an option*.

The evidence bears this out. Patterns of sexual violence **vary dramatically** between conflicts and armed groups, across time and space. This variation tells us that violence or restraint is shaped by policy choices, incentives, command structures, normative frameworks, and consequences for non-compliance. Even the most extreme belligerent behaviour is *subject to change*.

Today, nearly two decades after the establishment of UN Action, the **question is no longer *whether* conflict-related sexual violence can be prevented, but *how* we can prevent it most effectively**.

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One of the clearest lessons learnt in this agenda is that applying a **survivor-centred approach** is *not just a matter of ethics*; it is a *matter of effectiveness*. Survivors are *not just repositories of past stories*; they are *custodians of knowledge that can shape a safer future*. Across many war-torn corners of the world, I have met survivors who are

working in their communities as *agents of change* and *architects of peace*. It is vital to ensure that **their voices and choices shape the global search for solutions**.

To that end, **Security Council resolution 2467 (2019)** called for a survivor-centred approach to inform all prevention and response efforts. The new **UN Action Toolkit** we are launching today will help to *translate this promise into practice*, through a model that **shifts power back to the survivor**.

The Toolkit – developed *with survivors, for practitioners* – provides practical guidance to ensure that interventions **centre the rights, needs, and wishes of survivors**, recognizing that they are **not a homogenous group**, but face intersecting forms of discrimination.

This addition to UN Action’s **global knowledge hub**, builds on other pioneering tools, such as the **Matrix of Early-Warning Indicators**, developed to *translate early-warning signs into early action*, and the **Prevention Framework**, which articulates a two-track approach, namely: *primary prevention*, to address the root causes, drivers, and enabling conditions *before* CRSV occurs, and *secondary prevention*, to mitigate the risks of stigma and reprisals that *follow in its wake*.

Indeed, the **true measure of success is the atrocity that never occurs** – the life that is *not irreversibly divided into before and after an unimaginable tragedy*. As survivors have consistently told me: “*What happened to me could have been prevented*”; “*No other woman or girl should have to suffer as I did*”.

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Today, **we know more than ever before about the risks and repercussions of conflict-related sexual violence**. This makes our *collective responsibility even greater*. It is time to move from *best intentions* to *best practice*.

Yet these crimes, which should have been *relegated to the history books*, continue to be *repeated in our daily headlines*. Last year, my mandate reported **almost 10,000 UN-verified cases** of conflict-related sexual violence used as a *tactic of war, torture, terror and political repression*. The **trend lines are worsening**, reflecting the widening scope of warfare globally, runaway military spending, arms proliferation, and record levels of forced displacement.

Everything we know, and are able to report, about these crimes ***stems from the courage of survivors – who risk stigma, reprisals, rejection, and public humiliation – to come forward.*** They cannot be expected to do so in the absence of assistance. It is time to *defend human dignity, not defund essential services.*

The **founding vision of UN Action** was to bridge sectoral siloes to deliver a **holistic response** that meets survivors' needs, from medical care, to psychological support, socio-economic reintegration, and access to justice. Rather than being forced to navigate fragmented systems, we *bring the system together around the survivor.*

UN Action has established and equipped **integrated service centres** in the **DRC, Mali, Sudan, Ukraine** and elsewhere. In **South Sudan**, support for survivors linked recovery with economic empowerment. In **Somalia**, reintegration programmes helped women formerly associated with Al-Shabaab to *rebuild their lives and livelihoods.* These projects have harnessed **digital technology**, for safe and confidential referrals, as well as using **mobile clinics** to reach survivors in remote, volatile regions. The lessons learned are *continually collated* into our knowledge hub, to inform the next generation of practice.

Excellencies,

At this critical moment of gender equality backlash, rising reprisals, cascading crises, and contracting aid budgets, we must **stand together on the right side of history as partners for progress.** As the **threat environment evolves**, UN Action continues to *hold a mirror up to the changing face of war*, deepening knowledge on **technology-facilitated violence**, and intersections with **food insecurity** and **climate shocks**. It continues to ensure that the UN system is armed with information and resources to operate *collectively and effectively.*

When I reflect on **what is at stake**, I think of the grandmother I met in **South Sudan**, caring for her 7-year-old granddaughter, who had been raped in the *very displacement camp to which they had fled for safety.* I think of the young woman in **eastern DRC**, who was gang-raped by militias in retaliation for speaking out against sexual violence, and driven from her home. I think of the **Rohingya woman** who said: *“The sexual violence I endured broke my heart and my mind, but not my spirit!”* Such voices are still *too rarely heard in these halls.* As world leaders gather to confront the global challenges of our time, we *cannot allow the plight and rights of survivors to be forgotten.*

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To the many governments and esteemed partners represented in this room, **my call to action is twofold:**

First, **ensure a survivor-centred, trauma-informed approach** by integrating the UN Action Toolkit into *all plans, policies and programmes*, as the **new global standard**.

Second, **sustain investment for its implementation** by providing urgently-needed funding to the UN Action Network, through its Multi-Partner Trust Fund, to **close critical protection and assistance gaps**.

Excellencies,

In line with the theme of this year's General Assembly, **that is how we will “*rebuild trust*” with conflict-affected communities and, ultimately, “*deliver for all*”**.

Eighty-one years ago, this Organization was founded to “***save succeeding generations from the scourge of war***”. Today, that promise *must include* the ***persistent – yet preventable – scourge of wartime rape***.

Thank you.

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