



**Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on
Sexual Violence in Conflict Margot Wallström**

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

(Abidjan, 25 November 2011)

Today, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, I ask people to stand in solidarity with the survivors of sexual violence in conflict throughout the world.

These survivors, mainly women and girls, have lived through unspeakable horrors at the hands of armed groups who deliberately and systematically use rape as a tactic of terror. For too long, crimes of sexual violence have been perceived as inevitable, unspeakable and a lesser crime. Together we must break down the walls of silence and shame.

The UN system, Governments, non-governmental organisations and advocacy groups in many countries are working to end impunity for perpetrators of these crimes.

I convey this message from West Africa, where I am undertaking an official visit to Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. In all three countries I have met with survivors of sexual violence, victims associations, UN entities, and officials from Governments and non-governmental organisations.

Political leaders throughout the world, spearheaded by the UN Security Council, have expressed their commitment to prevent and prosecute sexual violence. UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1960 are key achievements in this respect, but we cannot afford to grow complacent. Much more still needs to be done.

Both here in Côte d'Ivoire and last week in Sierra Leone, we have learned about sexual violence being used as a tool of political intimidation in the context of presidential and legislative elections. In Guinea-Conakry, the perpetrators of the 28 September 2009 stadium mass rape still remain at large. This is completely unacceptable.

Women are leaders and activists, but can only reach their full potential when they feel safe. Underlying attitudes about the rights of women will only change when people everywhere work together to change them.

I call on nations to support the United Nations Trust Fund for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The Fund, which celebrates its fifteenth anniversary this year, supports civil society organisations on the frontlines of fighting sexual violence and other types of violence against women.

On this occasion, let us all contribute in ways large and small to building a safer world for girls and women.

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