



# STOP RAPE NOW

UN ACTION AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

## Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on

### Sexual Violence in Conflict Margot Wallström

#### *4<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region*

*(Kampala, 15 December 2011)*

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Your Excellencies,

In the past, it has been said that women's concerns are '*cultural*', while men's concerns are '*political*'. Accordingly, rape has been regarded as private and cultural, rather than criminal and political. The Great Lakes Conference, however, treats women's rights and the prevention of sexual violence as **central to its peace, security and development interests**.

I would like to start by personally **commending your decision to hold a Special Session on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence** in the context of the fifth anniversary of the ICGLR, and as part of assessing progress made since the signing of the *Pact on Security, Stability and Development* in 2006. This is – above all – a message of hope and recognition to the victims.

Among the most important **barometers of progress** in achieving this *Pact* are the status of women and the realization of their physical security and rights. The *2006 Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children* signals that there will be consequences for rape – that inaction is not an option. This ambitious instrument must urgently be **domesticated and implemented** in all 11, soon to be 12, Member States.

Other speakers, including UN Deputy Secretary-General Dr. Migiro, have addressed the far-reaching effects of gender-based violence. My mandate, created by the UN Security Council in 2009, is specifically **focused on preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence**. This includes the use of rape as a tactic of war and political repression. Conflict generates sexual violence of a scale and severity rarely seen in times of peace. Such acts can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or acts of genocide. In contemporary conflicts, including in the Great Lakes region, we have seen that the more brutal and shocking the crime, the more effectively it terrorizes communities and lends notoriety to groups vying for power.

We have also seen that rape can be a *life sentence* for the survivors. They are sanctioned socially and economically. Their freedom of movement, health and human dignity is denied. By

punishing the perpetrators, we can lift this burden of *blame and shame* from the backs of innocent victims. **Formal accountability**, recognition and redress can make the difference between rape being a traumatic event, and rape being an event that permanently destroys lives and livelihoods.

As **leaders**, your words and actions can make that difference. The priority you give to this issue tells women and girls that *their lives matter*. It signifies that regional security is indivisible from women's security. The stakes could not be higher in terms of development, public health, community cohesion and, ultimately, a region that is safe for its mothers, sisters and daughters.

Survivors of sexual violence need access to a comprehensive package of support, including health and psychosocial care, judicial redress and reparations to help them rebuild their lives. This requires political resolve and resources commensurate with the scale of the problem. Therefore, combating sexual violence cannot just be the responsibility of gender and health ministries. It demands a **'whole of government' response**, engaging the full spectrum of stakeholders from ministries of justice, defense, security, education and the interior.

In short: this is everyone's business – from gender experts to Generals; from local police to regional and international peacekeepers. We must continually expand the circle of action. But while this may be everyone's business, it cannot be 'business as usual'. It is critical that all government actions are informed by a **deeper dialogue with women's groups**. And women themselves must be consulted in all measures taken on their behalf.

Political leaders should ask in relation to every peace, disarmament and conflict-resolution process: ***Where are the women?*** If sexual violence has been part of the waging of war, ending it must be part of the ceasefire and the making of peace. However, a UN study from 2009 showed that only ten peace agreements globally have *ever* mentioned sexual violence. This includes just five relating to conflicts in Africa. The same study found that women average fewer than 3 percent of signatories to peace agreements. This dramatically reduces the prospects of transitioning from a '*total war*' – fought on the bodies of women and children, to a '*total peace*' – in which all civilians are safe.

This is compounded by a lingering myth that rape is *inevitable* in times of war. But if sexual violence can be planned, it can be punished; if it can be commanded, it can be condemned. When members of the national military or police forces rape, it could be said that *the State rapes*. That is why no effort should be spared to **vet, train and professionalize the security sector**. If a survey was taken of national soldiers, how many would confirm that their leaders had instructed them to spare civilians and respect women and children, even in the midst of war? How many commanders would consider this one of their core responsibilities?

In this regard, it is laudable that ICGLR members are moving towards **'zero tolerance' policies** on sexual and gender-based violence. But a policy of 'zero tolerance' cannot be backed by zero

consequences. Steps must be taken to create the conditions in which sexual violence becomes a *liability* for armed forces and groups, rather than a *tool* for attaining military, political and economic ends.

For its part, the UN stands ready to deploy a newly-constituted **Team of Experts on the Rule of Law** to assist governments affected by conflict to strengthen institutional safeguards against impunity. In addition, all **national and regional early-warning mechanisms** should be attuned to the risk of impending, ongoing or escalating sexual violence, in order to trigger a rapid response. My office has developed a *Matrix of Early-Warning Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence* to help analysts and protection actors identify the ‘red flags’ of imminent sexual violence. This matrix is informed by the painful lessons of modern history, that you have committed to ensuring will never repeat.

Moreover, I will continue to call on governments around the globe to enact due diligence measures to track the flow of **conflict minerals** that fund the operations of many illegal armed groups. Illicit mineral exploitation is among the root causes of insecurity and sexual violence.

Your Excellencies,

No nation or region can realize its potential unless women and girls are able to realize theirs. The African Women’s Decade presents an opportunity to amplify women’s contribution to the destiny of this continent. **Empowering women begins with ending sexual violence** and the long shadow of fear it casts over countless lives. But to disarm the weapon of rape, we must recognize – once and for all – that it is not a ‘private’ issue to be silenced. It is a political and security issue, that demands a political and security response.

Thank you.