



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

**Sexual Violence in Conflict Margot Wallström**

***NEED TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS A TOOL OF POLITICAL INTIMIDATION  
IN RUN-UP TO ELECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE***

*(Freetown, 21 November 2011)*

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As part of an official visit to West Africa, I am currently in Sierra Leone -- a post-conflict country -- to gather a better understanding of how sexual violence during the war has influenced the society after the guns have fallen silent.

During my visit, I have held discussions with the United Nations Country Team, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), caregivers, survivors of sexual violence, and the Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police Force. I have also met with the Solicitor General, the Chief Justice, the Minister and Deputy Minister of Gender Affairs, and the Executive Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Schulenburg. Yesterday I travelled to Makeni, where I visited a reparations project for victims of sexual violence, and engaged with various interlocutors dealing with the issue.

I understand that the country as a whole, including the Government of Sierra Leone, wants to look to the future, instead of dwelling on the past. This is comprehensible. But we must not ignore the past or forget the survivors of sexual violence. Only a country thoroughly addressing the wrongdoings of the past can build a solid foundation for a successful and sustainable future. More needs to be done to support these survivors, both in terms of access to justice, services and to help them reintegrate into society. Additional resources are also required to strengthen the capacity of the judicial system in order to address the issue of sexual violence.

Preventing sexual violence is particularly important as Sierra Leone is drawing closer to elections, a period during which sexual violence is often used against political opponents, especially in post-conflict situations. I call on all people in positions of influence in Sierra Leone to speak up against the use of sexual violence as a tool of political intimidation and to do their utmost to put in place measures to prevent sexual violence from being employed to this effect.

I will continue to monitor the situation and to engage with the Government, the UN Country Team, civil society in Sierra Leone and the international community on this issue.

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