



Security Council

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Letter dated 6 December 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Ireland and Mexico, as co-chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on conflict-related sexual violence (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Geraldine Byrne Nason**
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Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain
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Annex to the letter dated 6 December 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Summary of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security with women's protection advisers focused on implementing the mandate to prevent and address sexual violence in conflict, 16 November 2021

The Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security met on 16 November 2021 with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, and with four senior women's protection advisers deployed in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), as well as the Chief of Human Rights and Rule of Law of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), who serves as the focal point on conflict-related sexual violence, pending the deployment of a women's protection adviser. The aim of the meeting was to discuss strategies and approaches for advancing implementation of the mandate to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence, building on the precedent of a dedicated meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the role and contribution of women's protection advisers, which had been convened on 10 November 2016, and following the biennial strategic retreat of women's protection advisers co-organized by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions about the integration of women's protection advisers as part of the necessary capabilities for the protection of civilians during transitions from peacekeeping missions, in line with the need to ensure that gender analysis and gender expertise informs all stages of mission planning and mandate implementation, following Council resolution [2594 \(2021\)](#). Other questions focused on ways to ensure that women's protection advisers are adequately equipped in terms of staffing, including in discussions in the Fifth Committee; the case of UNSMIL was raised as these specialized capacities have not been deployed to date, despite being referenced in the previous two UNSMIL mandate renewals of 2020 and 2021. Council members asked about the need to ensure partnerships with United Nations country teams to leverage resources and optimize mandate delivery. Council members also raised questions about ways to strengthen the fight against impunity for sexual violence crimes, including through the use of sanctions and targeted measures as a form of deterrence; briefings by women's protection advisers during the visiting missions of the Security Council and its sanctions committees were also raised. Other questions concerned how women's protection advisers are working to improve women's economic empowerment to reduce their vulnerability to violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. Council members welcomed and endorsed the recommendation to hold this meeting on an annual basis.

Main points raised in the meeting

The Special Representative underlined the acute challenges in the implementation of the conflict-related sexual violence mandate and in meeting the needs of survivors, particularly in the context of the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has resulted in the loss of livelihoods and income-generating activities, particularly for women, intensifying their care burden and amplifying gender-based inequality, which is a structural driver and root cause of conflict-related sexual violence. The Special Representative welcomed the innovations adopted by women's protection advisers in the field, to ensure mandate delivery in the face of lockdowns, quarantines and restrictions on travel and access. Furthermore, the Special Representative stressed that sexual violence continues to be recorded in conflict zones, including in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq and the Tigray region, and saluted the work of women's protection advisers to ensure access to life-saving services and justice for survivors. The Special Representative recalled that the compilation of the thirteenth annual report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence has been launched and that, typically, around 90 per cent of documented cases come from settings where the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence are in place and are convened by dedicated women's protection advisers. The arrangements also inform the listing of implicated parties and engagement with these actors to encourage compliance with international law. Moreover, the Special Representative recalled that eight sanctions regimes include sexual violence within their designation criteria and that her briefings to these Committees are informed by the monitoring and analysis of women's protection advisers in the field.

The Special Representative further indicated that her Office was currently leading the preparation of a special report of the Secretary-General on women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in conflict and children born of sexual violence in conflict, as mandated by the Security Council in its resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#), which will provide actionable recommendations to support both mothers and their children, facilitated by the presence of women's protection advisers on the ground in proximity to affected communities. The Special Representative noted that the roles of women's protection advisers should be assessed during the planning of United Nations field operations and should be deployed to offices of United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators, in line with resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#). In addition, she noted that the deployment of women's protection advisers to United Nations regional hubs would support the monitoring and response to cross-border patterns of conflict-related sexual violence, in order to enhance protection from conflict-driven trafficking, displacement and sexual violence by violent extremist and terrorist groups and networks. The role of women's protection advisers was created by the Security Council as part of the integrated architecture set out in its resolution [1888 \(2009\)](#), which includes the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict and the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict coordination network, which are based within the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to respectively strengthen judicial capacity for effective prosecution at the national level and to coordinate the United Nations system-wide response. Lastly, the Special Representative stressed the need to sustain political and financial support for the work of women's protection advisers on the ground, to use the tools created by the Security Council to protect persons at risk, to provide comprehensive, multisectoral assistance to survivors and to hold perpetrators accountable in order to ultimately prevent these atrocities.

The Senior Women's Protection Adviser from MINUSCA recalled how the political strife in January 2021 between the political forces in the Central African Republic and the attempt of the *Coalition des patriotes pour le changement* to block the elections and overthrow the government of President Touadera had resulted in heavy fighting between these actors, as well as heightening the risks of conflict-related sexual violence. Investigation missions documented a spike in cases of sexual violence in areas affected by the clashes; a three-fold increase of cases was recorded between December 2020 and February 2021, as compared with the same period the previous year, despite legitimate fears on the part of the population about coming forward to seek assistance. In the last 12 months, MINUSCA has recorded 451 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, of which 29 per cent were committed by groups affiliated with *Coalition des patriotes pour le changement*; 27 per cent were committed by the group 3R; 9 per cent by the group UPC; 7 per cent by anti-balaka forces; and 5 per cent by bilateral forces. The situation of the subprefecture of Bakouma, which had been under the control of armed groups from December 2020 to April 2021, hampered the dispatch of timely monitoring and investigation missions. Once safe passage was granted, 107 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence were documented, and service providers were mobilized to provide assistance to survivors through mobile clinics. There is an urgent need to deploy the UMIRR – the rapid intervention unit on sexual violence – to organize an investigation mission to Bakouma and thus lay the foundation to fight impunity. The senior women's protection adviser welcomed the new mandate of MINUSCA, particularly its robust references to conflict-related sexual violence, which will facilitate implementation of the joint communiqué to address such violence, as well as interaction with the recently appointed Special Adviser on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

The Senior Women's Protection Adviser from UNAMI recounted the atrocities committed by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) in 2014 against ethnic and religious communities, including the Yazidis, Christians, Kurds, Kaka'i, Sabaeans, Shabak, Shia Arabs and Turkmen, which included the use of rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery against women and girls as part of a deliberate policy to suppress, permanently expel or destroy these communities. Since then, the Senior Women's Protection Adviser has played a critical role in supporting the national authorities to implement the joint communiqué on preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence signed between the United Nations and the Government of Iraq in September 2016. Two key areas of progress were highlighted: (a) the Senior Women's Protection Adviser, along with United Nations agencies, advocated for the reopening of health-care centres to guarantee that survivors of sexual violence were able to access essential services during the height of the pandemic, at a time when lockdowns and related restrictions had deepened economic insecurity among survivors and other vulnerable groups; (b) on 1 March 2021, the Federal Parliament enacted the Yazidi Survivors Law, which constitutes a major step forward in addressing the needs of survivors of Da'esh atrocities and covers crimes committed since August 2014, including sexual violence, kidnapping, sexual slavery, selling of women in slave markets, forced family separation, forced conversion, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, forced abortion and other forms of physical and psychological harm. The Senior Women's Protection Adviser, United Nations partners and civil society organizations provided technical assistance to ensure the law was in line with international standards.

The UNSMIL Chief of Human Rights and Rule of Law, who serves as focal point for conflict-related sexual violence, underscored that, despite meaningful recent progress on the security and political fronts, many negative trends in terms of women's protection remained prevalent in Libya. In recent years, UNSMIL has documented numerous killings; enforced disappearances; incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence; arbitrary arrests and detentions, especially targeting

migrants and refugees; attacks against activists and human rights defenders; as well as hate crimes and incitement to violence, including against women who are active participants in public life, with little to no accountability for these grave crimes. The ongoing Libyan-led political process, and the October 2020 ceasefire agreement, have been crucial to help open space for all civilians to enjoy their human rights. Nonetheless, violence and rights violations against women and girls continue. Four key recommendations were outlined for consideration by the Security Council: (a) the protection architecture in UNSMIL must be fully built and supported, including through the deployment of women's protection advisers, in order to enhance monitoring, documentation, evidence-based advocacy and a victim-centred approach towards specialized care and service delivery; (b) impunity continues to be a critical challenge that hampers prevention efforts; unless both State and non-State actors are held accountable, civilians will not sustainably benefit from the dividends of peace; (c) given the clear link between sexual violence in detention settings and armed groups who operate under State authority and directly control prisons and migration detention facilities across Libya, meaningful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform strategies are required; and (d) there is an urgent need to support the full, meaningful and equal participation of Libyan women in public life, including as part of the political process and to tackle obstacles, such as the use of hate speech and incitement to sexual violence, including against civil society activists and human rights defenders. These recommendations will be critical to consider during the renewal of the mandate of UNSMIL at the end of January 2022.

The Senior Women's Protection Adviser from MINUSMA shared progress on the work of the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence, which have been critical to the collection and analysis of patterns and trends of conflict-related sexual violence, since its establishment in 2015. In this regard, the support of civil society organizations and service providers in locations that human rights investigators cannot access owing to security considerations has been critical. All mission components, including uniformed personnel, have supported the integration of the early-warning indicators of conflict-related sexual violence in the protection of civilians strategy, which has helped to ensure the visibility of women's protection issues in decision-making forums. The Senior Women's Protection Adviser has led the engagement with parties to the conflict. The two signatory armed groups, *Plateforme* and CMA, have signed unilateral communiqués to address conflict-related sexual violence and developed action plans in 2016 and 2017, respectively, although implementation has lagged owing to budgetary constraints. Support has been provided to the Government of Mali to address conflict-related sexual violence, since the signing of a joint communiqué in 2019, and the development of an implementation plan, which was endorsed by the national authorities. With respect to prevention, work with the Islamic High Council of Mali has led to the signing of a declaration by Cherif Haidara, on behalf of religious leaders to end conflict-related sexual violence, and the development of an action plan to strengthen the capacity of religious leaders to prevent these crimes. In terms of the fight against impunity, the Senior Women's Protection Adviser, in coordination with the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, supported the formation of a coalition of civil society organizations, the *Coalition pour l'accès à la justice et la protection des victimes de violences sexuelles liées au conflit*, to enhance access to justice for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence by pairing them with international non-governmental organizations and lawyers specialized in sexual violence crimes. Furthermore, eight judicial cases involving 197 victims of such violence are being handled by specialized lawyers in order to accelerate the pace of justice. In terms of challenges, the Senior Women's Protection Adviser mentioned the inadequate level of staffing, particularly in regional bases, and the need to activate

embassies in Bamako to mobilize resources for the full implementation of the joint communiqué.

The Senior Women's Protection Adviser from UNMISS recalled that the formation of a transitional national legislative assembly in August 2021 had not resulted in concrete progress on the enactment of critical legislation, which has led to uncertainty and has negatively impacted security, including delays in the process of unification of the armed forces. Moreover, the crises in neighbouring Ethiopia and the Sudan, and the influx of refugees, have heightened the risk of conflict-related sexual violence facing displaced women and girls. For instance, in the third quarter of 2021, 32 incidents affecting 51 survivors were recorded, marking a 28 per cent increase from the previous quarter. Security Council resolution [2577 \(2021\)](#) included a reference to the implementation of the Action Plan for the Armed Forces on addressing conflict-related sexual violence as a benchmark for a possible review of the arms embargo. This has allowed UNMISS to support the establishment of the Joint Implementation Committee, consisting of senior officials from the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, the pro-Riek Machar Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition, the South Sudan Opposition Alliance and the Ministry of Defence. Regarding the planned elections for 2023 and 2024, to mitigate the impact of subnational level localized conflicts and violence, namely in Tambura and Western Equatoria, monitoring, hotspot mapping and early-warning indicators on conflict-related sexual violence have been shared with the military and police components of the mission. The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional challenges to monitoring and reporting conflict-related sexual violence, compounded by the inaccessibility and insecurity of certain locations. In order to effectively prevent and respond to this scourge in South Sudan, there is a need to ensure adequate staffing capacities, and the support of international donors for the full implementation of the Joint Action Plan.

The Team Leader for Programmes and Communications in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict concluded the meeting by noting that the discussion was timely, as it directly followed a strategic retreat of women's protection advisers jointly convened by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights between 3 and 5 November 2021. Among the key findings and recommendations, it emerged clearly from this retreat that the Security Council-mandated tools, such as the annual report on conflict-related sexual violence, the list of implicated parties, press statements and sanctions designations, give women's protection advisers important leverage for their work, but need to be backed with sustained political resolve and resources. Following the retreat, a women's protection adviser community of practice has been launched as a peer-based platform to help build capacity across contexts and promote information-sharing and problem-solving in real-time. Four key points were emphasized on the way-forward: (a) women's protection advisers have evolved from being a specialized capacity in peacekeeping missions, to being included in special political missions, and now it is important to extend their presence to offices of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators and United Nations country teams, as well as United Nations regional hubs for crises that transcend borders in order to ensure coordination with regional and subregional bodies; (b) political support by the Security Council to compel parties to adhere to their commitments, and calls for ceasefires and restraint, are critical to enabling the work of women's protection advisers. This political backing can be demonstrated by Council members and sanctions committees meeting with women's protection advisers on the ground during visiting missions, to discuss progress in translating Security Council commitments into security sector compliance, and to discuss

priorities that should inform the renewal of mission mandates; (c) in terms of resourcing, in addition to advocacy in and with the Fifth Committee, creative approaches are required, such as the establishment of partnerships, secondments, roster deployments and catalytic bridge funding. Women's protection advisers interact with grass-roots women's organizations, peacebuilders and human rights defenders, and it is vital to ensure these actors are adequately resourced and protected from threats and reprisals, or outreach and service-delivery will always be impeded, particularly in remote and insecure areas; (d) to promote accountability, there is a need for greater coherence between the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence and the list of parties involved in these crimes, and the work of Security Council subsidiary bodies, such as the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities and other sanctions regimes. The consistent application of designation criteria against individuals who have engaged in "actions or policies related to planning, directing, or committing acts involving sexual violence" is an important enforcement tool, given the slow pace of international justice. The mandate to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence must be matched with corresponding capabilities, and with sustained political support, including calls for women's protection advisers to have access to detention centres, displacement settings, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration cantonment sites, and other hotspots.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Team Leader further recollected that, when the mandate was established by the Security Council in 2009, it identified the dearth of data as a stumbling block to action and prescribed the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence, to be convened by dedicated women's protection advisers, as a stepping-stone to obtaining more timely, accurate, objective and reliable information. Yet, when the first conflict-related sexual violence unit was established in MONUSCO in 2010, and the first senior women's protection adviser was deployed to UNMISS that same year, it was not envisaged that 12 years later there would be just 7 active senior women's protection advisers in place, and a total of around 20 dedicated women's protection adviser staff deployed globally, including field teams. Women's protection advisers have deepened the evidence-base on trends and patterns of conflict-related sexual violence and have supported national efforts to eradicate these crimes, yet the reach and resources of women's protection advisers are nowhere equal to the scale of the challenge.

Recommendations

The recommendations below were made by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sexual Violence in Conflict.¹

In view of upcoming negotiations on the mandates of United Nations peace operations and Special Political Missions, the Security Council should retain existing references to the deployment of Women's protection advisers and should consider adding the following strengthened language:

- Calls for the timely deployment of women's protection advisers in situations of concern and requests peace operations and special political missions to include a sufficient number of these positions in their regular budgets to reach conflict-

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in this meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council members.

affected areas and operate in proximity to communities at risk in order to ensure the effective implementation of the Sexual Violence in Conflict mandate.

- Requests that during transition processes from United Nations peace operations to special political missions and/or United Nations country teams that the deployment of women's protection advisers are included among the necessary capabilities and capacities of United Nations presences to support protection of civilians efforts and the consolidation of peace, and are adequately reflected in planning processes, including through specific benchmarks and indicators, to ensure the effective engagement with parties to conflict for time-bound commitments to address sexual violence, and to retain the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence as a reliable information base for timely prevention and response.

In addition, the Informal Expert Group co-chairs and other Council members should:

(a) Call for support from the international community, in particular the donor community, to provide earmarked contributions for the deployment of women's protection advisers in situations of concern, including in the offices of United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators, to support the work of national authorities, survivor networks, women's human rights defenders, religious leaders and service providers to ensure the implementation of a survivor-centred approach in all activities and to promote the establishment of regional monitoring and reporting arrangements, as needed;

(b) Advocate in the context of the Fifth Committee for the maintenance of existing women's protection adviser positions and request the inclusion of enhanced capacity in contexts where it remains inadequate or non-existent;

(c) Activate embassies in relevant countries to reinforce and amplify the efforts of women's protection advisers, including to ensure that conflict-related sexual violence concerns are duly addressed in ceasefire agreements, peace processes, electoral monitoring arrangements, early-warning systems and transitional justice mechanisms;

(d) Use periodic visiting missions of the Security Council and Sanctions Committees, as relevant, to engage with women's protection advisers, where they are deployed, and to raise concerns about gaps in compliance with international norms, including Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence, with senior United Nations leadership, national authorities, and all parties to the conflict;

(e) Call upon relevant parties and authorities to ensure that women's protection advisers have unhindered access to conflict-affected areas, detention settings, refugee and internally displaced persons camps and cantonment sites to carry out their monitoring, reporting and response efforts;

(f) Give due consideration to convening dedicated meetings of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security on the work of women's protection advisers, for instance on an annual basis, as a platform to hear operational updates from field-based specialists in countries on the Security Council's agenda.

The Co-Chairs thanked the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the participating women's protection advisers, and all participants in the meeting, and committed to following-up on the important issues raised.