



Event to commemorate the 6th official observance of the

International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

co-hosted by the Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Office of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict, the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations

“The impact of COVID-19 on survivors of conflict-related sexual violence”

*Virtual Room 1, 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Friday, 19 June 2020 - via Microsoft Teams*

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#### ***Background & objectives:***

The Coronavirus pandemic is impacting dramatically the lives of victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) as well as all aspects of the work carried out by the Offices of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict and SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict, and the United Nations as a whole.

Already a dramatically under-reported crime, CRSV has been further obscured by this pandemic. COVID-19 hampers the possibility of **survivors to report sexual violence** and further exacerbates the existing structural, institutional and sociocultural barriers to reporting such crimes. On 23 March, the Secretary-General issued a global call for a ceasefire in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, stating that such a global ceasefire would “bring hope to places among the most vulnerable to COVID-19.”

Combatting impunity for sexual violence is a central aspect of deterring and preventing such crimes. It is also a central element of providing redress for victims. In this regard, COVID-19 has a significant and **detrimental impact on all aspects of the rule of law response** including accountability for CRSV. This entails limitations on the availability and capacity to receive and process reports on incidents of sexual violence by law enforcement and judicial authorities.

**Services needed by survivors risk being deprioritized in many settings**, including shelters, health care services, police and justice sector services. This pandemic is severely impacting the delivery of

the range of medical, psychosocial and legal services required to support survivors of CRSV. There are reports of shelters for gender-based violence survivors being closed and mobile clinics and counselling services being cancelled and resources being diverted. **Another obstacle to accessing services is fear of the spread of the virus.** Health providers and emergency first responders are often the first point of contact for survivors of sexual violence. Yet, women including survivors of sexual violence may be less willing to seek help, particularly for health services, because of perceived risks of contracting COVID-19, for fear of infection and the potential for transmitting the virus to their families.

Stay-at-home restrictions and other measures inhibiting the movement of people have contributed to an increase in domestic and gender-based violence. **Women and girls already in abusive situations are more exposed to increased control and restrictions by their abusers,** with little or no recourse to seek support. Accessing help can also be more difficult due to confinement with the abuser.

Finally, quarantines and other restrictions on movement are also disrupting the **monitoring, reporting and outreach work of Senior Women Protection Advisers (SWPAs)**, Child Protection Advisers, and United Nations entities mandated to gather information, verify violations and enhance compliance by both State and non-State parties with international obligations, including relevant Security Council resolutions.

In line with General Assembly Resolution of 13 July 2015 (A/RES/69/293), a virtual event will be organized on 19 June 2020 to mark the sixth annual International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. The purpose of this event is to outline a number of implications and consequences related to the effects of COVID-19 on the lives of the survivors, as well as on the delivery of the CRSV mandate and the work of the UN system as a whole.

***Event format:***

The event will consist of an opening segment by the organisers, followed by Senior Women Protection Advisers (SWPAs) from different country settings who will give testimony on the actual and projected implications and consequences of COVID-19 on their work. To conclude, Member States and Regional Groups will be invited to make brief interventions.<sup>1</sup>

***Opening Segment:***

*Moderator: Chief of Staff, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Mr. Tonderai Chikuhwa*

- 1. Chargé d' Affaires of Argentina to the United Nations, Minister Alejandro Verdier*
- 2. Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Under-Secretary-General, Ms. Pramila Patten*
- 3. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and Under-Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba*

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<sup>1</sup> Member States and Regional Groups wishing to make an intervention are requested to contact the Permanent Mission of Argentina to inscribe on the speakers list by Monday 15 June 2020.

***Special Guests:***

*Moderator: Chief of Staff, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Mr. Tonderai Chikuhwa*

- 4. Statement from the Democratic Republic of the Congo Special Advisor to the President for Youth, Gender and Violence against Women, Ms. Chantal Yelu Mulop*
- 5. Voices from the field from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan (Darfur)*
- 6. Brief interventions from Member States and Regional Groups, including co-sponsors of General Assembly Resolution 69/293*

*The Moderator closes the event.*

***Expected outcomes:***

- 1. Statements by Member States, senior United Nations officials, and special guests will reflect on the consequences of COVID-19 on CRSV survivors and potential mitigating and response measures;*
- 2. Member States will reiterate their commitment to a survivor-centred approach in the COVID-19 response to CRSV survivors and provide updates on their political and financial support to the CRSV agenda;*
- 3. Media coverage, including promotion of key messages on social media (#EndRapeinWar) and a dedicated microsite hosted by the United Nations Department of Global Communications featuring the Secretary-General's annual message and other relevant resources*

*[www.un.org/en/events/elimination-of-sexual-violence-in-conflict/messages.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/events/elimination-of-sexual-violence-in-conflict/messages.shtml).*

*Live webcast available at <http://webtv.un.org/>*

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