

Event to commemorate the 9th 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, and the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations

“Bridging the gender digital divide to prevent, address and respond to conflict-related sexual violence”

Conference Room 1, Monday, 19 June 2023, 10 a.m.-11:30 a.m. EDT

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

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

Every new wave of conflict brings with it a rising tide of human tragedy, including new waves of war’s oldest, most silenced, and least condemned crime - sexual violence. Conflict-related sexual violence, whether against women, girls, men, or boys in all their diversity, continues to be used as a tactic of war, torture, and terrorism amid deepening political and security crises, compounded by militarization and the illicit proliferation of arms.

New crises have multiplied as entrenched conflicts have deepened, resulting in shrinking civic space and rising reprisals against human rights defenders, activists, and journalists. Reprisals have targeted frontline actors delivering lifesaving services to survivors, and sexual violence has itself been used as a tool of retaliation against protestors, detainees, victims, and witnesses. Sexual harassment and gender-based hate speech have also surged in the digital space. While the use of information and communications technology has contributed to the empowerment of women and girls and other groups in vulnerable situations, its use has also enabled the propagation of violence.

In some settings, disturbing trends of gender-based hate speech and incitement to violence fuelled conflict in which rape and other forms of sexual violence are used to humiliate and destabilize targeted communities. Hate speech – including online – has become one of the most common ways of spreading divisive rhetoric on a global scale. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres stated: *“We must confront bigotry by working to tackle the hate that spreads like wildfire across the internet.”*

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) may be used directly as a tool for making digital threats and inciting gender-based violence, including threats of physical and/or sexual violence, rape, killing, unwanted and harassing online communications, or even the encouragement of others to harm women physically. When the rights of women and girls in all their diversity are not respected online, the underlying structural problems driving gender and other biases are amplified, their opportunities limited, and room for engagement inaccessible, becoming spaces for exploitation.

On the other hand, ICT can be a powerful tool to improve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, contribute to building their resilience in times of crises, increase the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as help survivors fight against impunity and improve accountability. For instance, the use of specific applications can help women in imminent danger to alert emergency contacts, or enable the documentation of the experiences of survivors of sexual violence as a step towards accountability. Additionally, ICT can help enhance the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in peace processes, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. Training opportunities online provide tools that allow participants to be educated about their rights.

However, women and girls in all their diversity may be particularly vulnerable to violence because of multidimensional poverty, disability and limited or lack of access to justice, effective legal remedies, and psychosocial services, including protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration, and to health-care services. Violence against women and girls is a major impediment to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and it violates and impairs or nullifies their full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. A lack of access for women and girls to affordable, accessible, and reliable technologies remains a critical challenge in many countries, including countries in situations of conflict, post-conflict countries, countries affected by natural disasters, the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States, middle-income countries, and countries transitioning to a higher income per capita." There is an urgent need to address prevailing challenges to bridge the digital divides, including the gender digital divide, to harness information and communications technologies for sustainable development, and to protect and respect the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. All efforts should be deployed to reduce the price and enhance the affordability of information and communications technologies and broadband access and use, bearing in mind that deliberate interventions, including through research and development and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms, may be necessary to spur the development of lower-cost connectivity options. More needs to be done in bridging the gender digital divide and ensuring technology is safe and accessible to all. We must guarantee safe and equitable access to inclusive and quality education, including digital literacy for all. It is crucial to invest in technologies and innovation aimed at violence prevention and response strategies, which are survivor-centered and designed with a gender and human rights-based approach which takes into account age sensitivity; builds inclusive innovation ecosystems; and prevents and combats technology-facilitated gender-based violence and discrimination.

International cooperation must be enhanced to counter increasing sexual and gender-based violence, harassment and hate speech occurring both offline and online, as these pose a real threat to democracy by weakening women and girls' participation in society. There must be gender-transformative solutions that tackle underlying discriminatory norms, attitudes, behaviours, and social systems, while transforming the power dynamics and structures that maintain gender inequalities.

In line with General Assembly Resolution 69/293 of 2015, an event will be held to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. This International Day is commemorated every year, on or around 19 June, which marks the date of the unanimous adoption of the first Security Council resolution to recognize conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to international peace and security (S/RES/1820 of 2008). The purpose of this event is to stand in solidarity with the survivors, and those supporting them, to spark hope, knowledge and inspiration as we lift our voices to say: “#EndRapeInWar”.

### ***Event format:***

The event will begin with opening remarks by the three co-hosts, followed by a short video from Her Royal Highness Maria Teresa, Grand Duchess of Luxembourg and Global in the Fight against Sexual Violence in Conflict. A leading Colombian journalist, survivor, women’s human rights defender and Global Champion in the Fight against Conflict-Related Sexual Violence will deliver a statement. This will be followed by remarks by the Director of Programme at Physicians for Human Rights (PHR). The coordinated work of the United Nations in “delivering as one” in the fight against conflict-related sexual violence will be presented by the Deputy Executive Director (Programme) and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), an active member of the UN Action network, which is chaired by the SRSG-SVC. To conclude, representatives of Member States, Regional Groups, and Civil Society 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, Ms. Nancee Oku Bright*

1. *Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations, H.E. María del Carmen Squeff*
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*

### ***Special Guests:***

*Moderator: Chief of Staff, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Nancee Oku Bright*

4. *Video statement from Her Royal Highness Maria Teresa, Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, and Global Champion in the Fight against Sexual Violence in Conflict*

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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 (Ms. María Florencia González: [gzf@mrecic.gov.ar](mailto:gzf@mrecic.gov.ar) to inscribe on the speakers’ list by **Wednesday 14 June 2023**.

5. *Statement from the Colombian journalist, survivor, and Global Champion in the Fight against Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Jineth Bedoya Lima*
6. *Statement from Director of Programme at Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), Ms. Karen Naimer*
7. *Statement from the Deputy Executive Director (Programme) and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Ms. Diene Keita, on behalf of the UN Action network*
8. *Brief interventions from Member States and Regional Groups, including co-sponsors of General Assembly Resolution 69/293*
9. *Statement from the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, Ms. Maria Victoria “Mavic” Cabrera Balleza*

*Moderator closes the event.*

***Expected outcomes:***

1. *Statements by the panelists, Member States, and senior United Nations officials, as informed by the perspectives of survivors and civil society representatives, will highlight the urgency for States and non-State actors to bridge the gender digital divide in conflict settings, fight online violence against women and girls in all their diversity, and promote digital tools and platforms designed to amplify efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict, while ensuring the realization of the human rights of all survivors.*
2. *Member States will reiterate their commitment to addressing CRSV, including through adequate, flexible, and sustainable resourcing to the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Multi-Partner Trust Fund (CRSV MPTF).*
3. *Enhanced media coverage globally, including the 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: <https://bit.ly/2RI03oJ>*

