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Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is prepared in response to the request contained in resolution [56/1](#) of the Commission on the Status of Women on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflict. It includes information from Member States and provides an update on attention given to issues relating to the topic in intergovernmental processes.



I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-sixth session, in 2012, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted resolution [56/1](#) on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts. Recalling its previous resolutions on the topic, the Commission continued to express its grave concern at the continuation of armed conflicts in many regions throughout the world and the human suffering and humanitarian emergencies that they caused. The Commission recalled relevant provisions contained in the instruments of international humanitarian law relative to the protection of the civilian population as such, as well as relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, including on the prevention of armed conflict, on women and peace and security and on children and armed conflict.

2. The Secretary-General was requested to submit to the Commission at its fifty-eighth session a report on the implementation of resolution [56/1](#), including relevant recommendations, taking into account the information provided by States and relevant international organizations. The present report is prepared in response to that request. It includes information from two Member States and provides an update on attention given to issues relating to the topic in intergovernmental processes.

II. Information from Member States

3. The Governments of Denmark and Togo responded to a request sent to Member States to provide information regarding the status of implementation of resolution [56/1](#). Denmark reported that it observed its international obligations mentioned in that resolution, while Togo indicated that the phenomenon discussed therein did not occur in Togo.

III. Attention given to issues relating to the topic in intergovernmental processes

4. Since the previous report to the Commission ([E/CN.6/2012/7](#)), intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council and its Advisory Committee, have continued to receive information on and consider a range of issues relating to the topic, such as enforced disappearances and missing persons; kidnapping and hostage-taking, including terrorist hostage-taking; protection of civilians; and abduction and forced recruitment of children in armed conflict. At the normative level, notable progress was made in advancing the global women and peace and security agenda, including with regard to the prevention of sexual and other forms of violence in conflict, the promotion and protection of women's human rights in conflict and post-conflict settings, monitoring of violations and elimination of impunity.

5. Several measures have been enacted to ensure robust reporting, protection of victims and support for families with regard to enforced disappearances. As at mid-November 2013, 93 States had signed and 40 ratified or acceded to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has

remained vigilant in advocating on behalf of victims and their families. In its annual report ([A/HRC/22/45](#) and Corr.1), in which it discussed the communications and cases examined in 2012, it called attention to the need to remove barriers for women to claim their rights to reparations. In October 2012, the Working Group held an event to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, which included focused discussions on the impact of enforced disappearances on women and the role of women as actors of change. Participants addressed gender-specific vulnerabilities of women and the socioeconomic consequences of enforced disappearances on women and their families.

6. In its resolution [67/177](#) on missing persons, adopted in December 2012, the General Assembly called upon States that were parties to an armed conflict to take all appropriate measures to prevent persons from going missing in connection with the armed conflict, to account for persons reported missing as a result of such a situation and to ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of offences linked to missing persons. The Assembly noted the need to ensure access to justice and protection for victims and witnesses, especially women and children, in proceedings before the courts and in other transitional justice mechanisms. It requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Human Rights Council at its relevant session and to the Assembly at its sixty-ninth session a comprehensive report on the implementation of the resolution.

7. Several reports submitted to and outcomes of intergovernmental bodies expressed explicit concern about the continued incidence of hostage-taking in situations of armed conflict, including terrorist and maritime piracy hostage-taking, and its impact on families and communities. For example, the Security Council, in its resolution [2100 \(2013\)](#), expressed its continued concern over the serious threats posed by transnational organized crime in the Sahel region and its increasing links, in some cases, with terrorism, and strongly condemned the incidents of kidnapping and hostage-taking with the aim of raising funds or gaining political concessions, noting the increase in such kidnappings in the region and underscoring the urgent need to address those issues. The independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic noted in its report ([A/HRC/24/46](#)) that hostage-taking and kidnapping had risen sharply. According to the commission, armed men, motivated by financial gain or to exchange prisoners held by opposing forces, abduct and hold individuals under threat of death. Scores remain captive; others have been released after negotiation. In the period under review, dozens were killed.

8. Intergovernmental bodies have remained seized of efforts made to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, including through reports and briefings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Updated lists of parties to conflict that engage in the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence against children, the killing and maiming of children in contravention of international law, recurrent attacks on schools and/or hospitals or recurrent attacks or threats of attack against protected personnel are contained in the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (most recently, [A/67/845-S/2013/245](#)). In the statement by the President of the Security Council on children and armed conflict adopted in June 2013 ([S/PRST/2013/8](#)), the Council strongly condemned violations of international law involving the recruitment and abduction of children by parties

to armed conflict and demanded that all relevant parties should immediately put an end to such practices and take special measures to protect children.

9. In accordance with resolution [56/1](#), the Secretary-General has continued to ensure the dissemination of information and materials relating to Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security. The normative framework in this area has been further strengthened by two new resolutions adopted by the Council in 2013. In resolution [2106 \(2013\)](#), adopted on 24 June, the Council focused on addressing impunity and further operationalizing guidance on the issue of sexual violence in conflict. In resolution [2122 \(2013\)](#), adopted on 18 October, it called for more determination in ensuring women's engagement in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It requested that reports and briefings to it should address the impact of conflict on women, in addition to recognizing the need to address the full range of violations experienced by women during conflict.

10. Another significant development since the previous report was the adoption in October 2013 by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of general recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations. It gives authoritative guidance to countries that have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on specific measures to ensure that women's human rights are protected before, during and after conflict. It makes clear that the Convention applies in all forms of conflict and post-conflict settings and allows for better monitoring of women's human rights in such settings.

IV. Observations and recommendations

11. **Since the previous report of the Secretary-General, a number of intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council, have continued to give attention to issues relevant to the topic covered in resolution [56/1](#). Stronger normative frameworks and mechanisms are now in place to address and take more determined action on issues such as enforced disappearance, missing persons, hostage-taking and the protection of women and children in armed conflict.**

12. **The ratification and effective implementation of all related international instruments and enhanced efforts to end impunity for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, along with measures to support victims, witnesses and their families, remain essential to preventing and combating acts of hostage-taking in armed conflicts.**

13. **Two Member States responded to the request for input to the present report, which may be an indication of the increasing reporting on issues covered in resolution [56/1](#) in related intergovernmental processes. Given this attention, the Commission on the Status of Women may wish to consider recommending that information on women and children taken hostage and means to facilitate their immediate release be reported to all other relevant processes and integrated into relevant reports of the Secretary-General rather than being prepared as a separate biennial report to the Commission.**