

March 13, 2013

RE: Uphold Women's Rights at 57th Commission on the Status of Women

Dear Delegate,

We, the International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict, call on you as a member state taking part in the 57th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to uphold international obligations towards women's rights and conclude the session with a strong communiqué that will pave the way for accelerated action to end gender violence.

Members from the International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict, including Nobel Peace Laureate and Campaign Co-Chair Jody Williams, joined allies in New York last week to call on member states for strong action to stop rape in conflict. As negotiations towards a final outcome enter the second and final week, we are alarmed that a number of states are using the Commission to reverse hard-won progress the global community has made in the past couple of decades to eliminate violence against women.

At a very minimum, the Commission on the Status of Women must uphold the universally agreed-upon language on women's rights including CEDAW, the General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

The Campaign is deeply concerned about efforts to remove reference to language specific to these international agreements on women's rights from the Commission's final documents. In particular, certain states adamantly claim that religious or cultural traditions should take precedent over ending violence against women. As an international Campaign with members in more than 125 countries, we stress that religion or culture must never be used as an excuse to perpetuate gender violence.

Furthermore, we are concerned that some states are again making sexual and reproductive rights a point of contention, and equally disturbing, are objecting to language that will define rape to include forced sexual acts with a partner.

Gender violence is a global epidemic, ranging from domestic violence to systematic rape in conflict. To end a UN Commission intended to address gaps in current responses to gender violence with weakened global cooperation to end violence against women, sends a message to perpetrators that they can continue their crimes with impunity. Survivors deserve more from the international community.

It is imperative that the international community reaffirm its commitment to women's rights. We remind you that current discussion of new targets for when the Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015 is ongoing, and the statement from the Commission will impact this process.



**THE INTERNATIONAL
CAMPAIGN TO
STOP RAPE & GENDER VIOLENCE
IN CONFLICT**

We urgently call on member states of the Commission to show strong leadership to prevent violence against women and rape in conflict, to protect women and girls from violence, including through provision of needed psychosocial and medical services, and to provide survivors with access to comprehensive justice mechanisms including prosecution of perpetrators.

In order to advance both national and international justice mechanisms to address serious crimes of gender violence, we call on you to support the adoption of an amendment proposed by Liechtenstein that would further justice for survivors by supporting the complementary and necessary work of the International Criminal Court.

As thousands of women and survivors of gender violence have gathered in New York for this historic moment as the United Nations prioritizes ending violence against women, and millions more around the globe watch intently, we hope you will listen to our collective call for action and emerge with a final statement that provides a clear path of action to end the epidemic.

Sincerely,

Jody Williams
Nobel Peace Prize, 1997
Co-Chair, International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict
Chair, Nobel Women's Initiative

Autonomous Women's Center, Serbia
Association for Women's Rights in Development
Catholics of Choice
Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises, Democratic Republic of Congo
Global Fund for Women, United States
Human Rights Watch, United States
Infoteka, Bosnia & Herzegovina
JASS Just Associates
Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas, Colombia
Observatorio Genero Democracia y Derechos Humanos, Colombia
Physicians for Human Rights, United States
Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral, Democratic Republic of Congo
Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa
V-Day
Women's League of Burma
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Women's Media Center's Women Under Siege Project
Women's Network Croatia
World Pulse