

**STATEMENT OF ZAINAB HAWA BANGURA
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ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT**

**SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE
ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT**

2 June 2016

I wish to thank the Government of France for hosting this Open Debate, and the Council for the priority accorded this issue.

I am grateful, Mr. Secretary-General, for your personal presence and unwavering support.

I appreciate also that Lisa Davis of MADRE is able to join us today, giving voice to civil society who are a moral compass for this mandate.

As well as Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, for being here.

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**Mr. President, Members of the Security Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

As highlighted by the Secretary-General, in the past decade we have witnessed a fundamental shift in the way this issue is understood and addressed as a peace and security concern, and there has been unprecedented progress.

Yet even as we make gains, new and critical challenges have emerged:

Today, as we deliberate here, women are being traded in an open slave bazaar in Raqqa;

Price-lists exist to regulate their sale, like livestock at a farmers' market;

A so-called 'Fatwa' has been issued by Daesh that codifies sexual slavery, attempting to justify sexual violence through Holy Scriptures;

Social media platforms are being used to facilitate trade and trafficking – women and children are offered in the same on-line forums as rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.

“This one is young, beautiful and good in bed. I need at least 7,500 US dollars for her, you won't regret it.”

This is part of the message thread under a photograph of a girl painted with bright red lipstick. She cannot be older than 12 years. Eventually the winning bid is 7,700 dollars, offered by a Libyan ISIL fighter.

When I visited the Middle East last year I met with girls who have escaped captivity. Some of them told me that they had been the objects of as many as eight separate transactions during 2 years of captivity, before finally escaping or being ransomed by their families.

But thousands more are missing – in Syria, Iraq, Nigeria and elsewhere.

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The report before you today is the eighth dedicated account of conflict-related sexual violence. Cumulatively, these reports build a historical record for a crime that has long been omitted from official accounts of war and peace.

As this report outlines in harrowing detail, we are confronting new and previously unforeseen threats. Just as we make

inroads with national security forces, the problem of sexual violence by non-State actors acquires ever-more difficult and disturbing dimensions.

Consider the fact that of the 48 parties listed in the Annex of the Secretary-General's report, 37 of them are **non-state armed actors**. Yet, the instruments that we have as a UN system are primarily to engage Member States.

Therefore, new tools and approaches will be required to enforce compliance of these actors, who often vary dramatically in character, composition, motivations, capacity and *modus operandi*.

We face both **political and operational challenges** in this regard. But if we are to eradicate sexual violence in conflict, this mandate must focus on the *persistent perpetrators*, and will require the support of the Security Council to do so.

At the same time we must confront a new reality, that sexual violence today is used not only as a *tactic of war*, but also as a *tactic of terrorism*.

Without exception, the first sign of rising violent extremism has been the restriction on women's rights. Extremists know that to populate a territory, and control a population, you must first control the bodies of women.

Sexual violence is not merely *incidental*, but *integral*, to their ideology and strategic objectives. They are using sexual violence as a means of advancing political, military and economic ends. They have used rape and forced marriage as part of the systems of punishment and reward through which they consolidate power, and to build a so-called 'state' cast in their own image and beliefs.

The same litany of horrors echoes across the accounts of Nigerian girls who fled from Boko Haram, the tales of Somali women liberated from Al-Shabaab, and depictions of women's lives in northern Mali under the extremist group Ansar Dine.

When we think of terrorism, we think of destruction of property, killing, bombing or hostage-taking. But we cannot deplore the public violence of terrorism, while ignoring the violence terrorists inflict on women and girls in private, behind closed doors.

And, we must also confront the reality that after all they have endured in captivity, many victims of Daesh and Boko Haram face the additional heartbreak of being shunned by their own communities if they return.

Sexual violence is still the only crime that stigmatizes the victim, rather than the perpetrator. We must not only “bring back our girls”; we must bring them back to an environment of support, equality and opportunity. **Social and economic reintegration is imperative**, and must become a more integral part of our programmatic response and post-conflict development frameworks.

The war of conquest of extremist groups is being fought on – and fought over – the bodies of women and girls, generating millions of dollars in revenue. This is not just *objectification*; it is *commodification*. It is the revival of the slave trade in our own life and times.

The promise of access to wives and sex slaves is used to attract recruits, and serves as a form of compensation for fighters. Each time a woman is traded, the transaction generates a profit. It is part of the **political-economy of terrorism**, just as the sale of oil, antiquities or drugs.

If these groups are beyond the reach of judicial deterrence, then we must focus on divesting them of resources, and degrading their capacity to communicate, travel, trade, and do harm. This must form a part of our global, regional and national strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism.

As the report notes, *“counter-terrorism strategies can no longer be decoupled from efforts to protect and empower women and girls and to combat conflict-related sexual violence”*.

Through our sanctions infrastructure, we must raise the cost of these crimes, because the human costs defy calculation;

Through strategic communication, a counter-narrative must ring out loud, clear and consistent: that the human, sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls are non-negotiable;

Traditional and religious leaders must use their moral authority to negate any attempt to legitimize rape on religious grounds;

Our response must recognize and address the nexus of conflict-related sexual violence with cross-border trafficking to fund conflict and terrorism;

And our normative framework, including the resolutions of this Council, must keep pace with the changing global security context and this new dimension of sexual violence deployed as a tactic of terrorism.

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The report also sheds light on other emerging concerns that are not yet adequately treated within the ambit of the resolutions

on sexual violence in conflict:

This includes the plight of **children born of wartime rape**, who also live in shadow and shame. They are often undocumented and stateless. Indeed, there may be thousands of such children, living on the peripheries of their communities, fertile ground for radicalization and recruitment. Failure to recognize these children, to nurture and protect them, represents a long-term threat to peace and security;

We have begun focusing more attention in the past few years on **sexual violence against men and boys**, a particular concern in context of detention and interrogation. But unfortunately male survivors are still a ‘blind-spot’ in our monitoring, not to mention service response;

The mass migration crisis has heightened the risk of sexual violence, including in places of supposed refuge. We understand more clearly than ever before the **acute vulnerability of refugees and IDPs** not only within camps or settlements, but at every stage of displacement, and how sexual violence may be a significant “push-factor” for displacement;

This year, in the case of **Burundi** which appears in the Secretary-General’s report for the first time, we received information of the targeting of women and girls on the basis of actual or perceived political affiliation or ethnic identity, with **rape employed as a tool of political repression** by arms bearers, including members of the national security forces. Sexual crimes used as part of the repertoire of violence during contested elections or public demonstrations, is a long-standing concern of this Council, from Kenya in 2007, to Guinea in 2009, and Cote d’Ivoire in

2011. It represents another dimension of this agenda that will require continued vigilance and tailored responses.

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Mr. President, Members of the Security Council,

My emphasis since taking Office has been on fostering **national ownership, leadership and responsibility**, which has required focused engagement in the affected countries. The advances of a number of national governments whom we support through our Team of Experts are encouraging, and show that this is not a “mission impossible”.

In the last two years we have gained a more intimate understanding of how the *resolutions* of this Council can be turned into *solutions* on the ground.

At the same time, we also have clearer sight of what is missing in the normative framework of resolutions that are our conceptual and operational guide.

That is why I ask the Council, on basis of this report, to continue deliberations in the coming weeks, and to consider a new resolution that will give us the tools for a comprehensive and multi-dimensional response that takes into account the rapidly shifting international peace and security landscape.

I believe in the unity of purpose of this Council, to give us what is needed to eradicate this crime once and for all.

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The past decade has seen greater progress and political momentum to end war-time rape than the rest of human history combined. I believe we are on the brink of converting a centuries-old culture of impunity into a culture of accountability and deterrence.

But at this crucial juncture we cannot afford to be complacent or lose our focus; we must meet the new challenges on the horizon; and, we must keep the searchlight of international scrutiny on this historically silenced crime.

When survivors tell us that “our bodies are worth less here than a dead rat” – it diminishes our collective humanity.

Ultimately, all our words, and laws, and resolutions, will mean nothing if violations go unpunished in practice, if we are unable to increase the *cost* and *consequences* for committing such crimes.

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To the victims and perpetrators alike, I would send a simple but unequivocal message – that justice may be delayed, but it will not be denied. And that the international community is steadfast and committed to live up to its sacred duty to prevent these crimes and care for survivors.

Thank you.