



[Remarks at the UN-APPG meeting on Protecting Women and
Girls in Emergencies]

**Tackling Violence against Women and Girls: A Joined up
Response**

(London, 13 November 2013)

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, UN Colleagues, Ladies and
Gentlemen,

I wish to thank the UN APPG, the APG-WPS and UNA-UK for
giving me the opportunity to address you this evening. The United
Kingdom has been a steadfast and vocal ally in the fight to end the
scourge of sexual violence in conflict, and this commitment and
leadership has been key in turning the tide against a war crime
that has hurt too many for too long.

Over the past several years we have gained a great deal of
momentum in addressing the silent epidemic of conflict-related
sexual violence against women and girls. Many countries have
stepped up to 'lead from the front', with dedication of financial
resources and political capital. This commitment is exemplified by
such actions as the UK's 'Prevention of Sexual Violence Initiative'
which has galvanized political support and financial resources,
increased global awareness of this issue and brought to bear the
skills of a roster of experts across a broad range of subjects that

are needed to fight sexual violence. During the 68th UN General Assembly an astounding 135 countries endorsed the *Declaration of Commitment to Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict*, a clear reflection of the hard work that the UK has done to put this item at the top of the world's agenda and keep it there.

The UN Security Council in particular has blazed a new trail by affirming that sexual violence is a fundamental peace and security concern requiring an operational security response. Through the adoption of a series of groundbreaking resolutions intended to combat conflict-related sexual violence, new institutional arrangements are being put in place, and Security Council mandates are becoming better and clearer at addressing this problem.

While it is also clear that the attention given by the Security Council to this issue needs to be more consistent, the recognition of sexual violence as a peace and security issue has been absolutely critical, as we have seen that such violations create and perpetuate an atmosphere of insecurity and affect the durability of peace and the sustainability of development. We see that it leads to a drastic decline in the number of girls able to safely attend school and the number of women able to access marketplaces, water points and polling booths. We see it used to terrorize men and boys in detention and elsewhere in the theatre of war. Sexual violence uproots and shatters families, turning the victims into outcasts in their communities. The psychological scars that remain beneath the surface of a society make peace less possible. I have witnessed this first-hand through the experience of war in

my native Sierra Leone. I have had the terrible privilege of coming into this job with a background in investigating, documenting and reporting on conflict-related sexual violence in my country, during the brutal conflict that lasted almost 12 years. I drafted the special court's reports and testified as an expert witness in that court on the phenomenon of forced marriage in conflict. My youngest victim was 3-years-old. I have seen up close the devastating consequences and dehumanizing effects of what we are talking about today on women in my own country, and I know that when widespread sexual violence is used during conflict it makes the difficult journey of recovery and reconciliation that much more difficult.

The establishment of the mandate which I now hold as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict is a central element of the Security Council agenda and strategy. Resolutions 1820, 1888, and 1960 have challenged long-standing myths that sexual violence is cultural or an inevitable consequence of war. Through these resolutions the circle of stakeholders is now wider than ever before -- extending beyond gender experts, to engage uniformed peacekeepers, mediators, ceasefire monitors, war crimes prosecutors, and the full range of civilian protection actors. With the addition of resolution 2106 adopted in June 2013 we now have a solid compliance and prevention framework on which to build a universal zero tolerance regime for conflict-related sexual violence. This resolution helps to raise the cost of committing this crime by, among other things: emphasizing more consistent and rigorous investigation and prosecution of sexual violence crimes as a crucial aspect of

deterrence, and ultimately prevention; ensuring that sexual violence considerations are specifically reflected in critical peace and security processes and arrangements, such as in Security Sector Reform and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration processes; and stressing the important operational role of military, police and civilian personnel in preventing sexual violence.

It is now more clearly understood that sexual violence as a “tactic of war” refers to acts of sexual violence that are linked with military, political or economic objectives, and that serve a strategic aim related to the conflict. However, sexual violence does not need to be explicitly orchestrated for military gain to be considered relevant to the Security Council. The Council also considers that sexual violence is conflict-related when it is “committed against civilians”, committed “in and around UN managed refugee and internally displaced persons camps”, or committed during “disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes”. Politically-motivated rape is also a disturbing trend witnessed in the wake of contested elections in places such as Kenya, Guinea and Cote d’Ivoire. We have witnessed its use as part of a repertoire of violence against political opposition in Libya and Syria. We see sexual violence as part of the conflict dynamics in northern Mali, where allegations include public rapes, subjecting women and girls to acts of sexual violence in front of family members, forced marriage, and sexual violence in the context of abductions and application of Sharia law. We have also witnessed this in the context of the fight for control of natural resources.

Such crimes present a security crisis that demands a security response.

Because of the widespread nature of this problem it is not something that any one State or entity can tackle alone and we need a multilateral, unified, holistic approach that has the participation and commitment of all UN Member States. Whether sexual violence in conflict is taking place within your borders, in a neighboring country or a world away, the destabilizing effects of this crime impact us all. This crime has international security implications and is linked to human trafficking and organized crime. Sexual violence also prevents the full participation of women and girls in the economic, political and social life of a country which undermines the pursuit of the development agenda. Sexual violence is a public health concern because the attendant physical and psychosocial repercussions are rarely addressed or treated, including the fact that it can serve as a vector for the spread of sexually transmitted disease. When rape is used as a weapon of war it can also result in the births of children who are abandoned by their mothers and face a life of poverty and rejection. Wartime rape is a rule of law issue and goes to the heart of our international norms and acceptable behavior in times of war. The legacy of sexual assault in war is also one that can stay with a country for generations after the conflict has ceased and if measures are not taken to end impunity and sensitize society this behavior can continue to be played out in communities after the peace agreements have been signed.

For these reasons and many more, we must all see it as our duty to work together to tackle this problem wherever it occurs. Rape in war is as old as war itself so we will not solve this problem overnight and it will take a combination of short and long term solutions to consolidate the gains we have made and effectively eliminate this threat once and for all.

One action that I believe is crucial to our success is to place even greater emphasis on national ownership, leadership and responsibility. I believe that this issue is not just a UN issue: it is first and foremost an issue that belongs to Member States, who ultimately bear the primary legal and moral responsibility to protect their citizens. Therefore, the emphasis on the responsibility of national actors is one of my central priorities. What is required more than anything else is a change in attitudes; from political leaders to activists, from journalists to religious leaders. Every sector of society needs to understand the devastating impact of this scourge, and demonstrate a collective will and determination to fight it. These attitudes and perceptions do not change overnight and to this end we should ensure that the UN and our partners work hand in hand to effectively support and strengthen national institutions to address sexual violence and raise awareness about the price of this offense.

We must continue our close engagement with affected countries, as well as regional and sub-regional organizations, to build strategic partnerships especially to advance the cause of prevention. I believe that affected countries themselves must play a central role in shaping the policies and direction of the conflict-

related sexual violence mandate in the Security Council in the future. Therefore, the array of UN and other institutional tools that are now available – including my Office, the Team of Experts on Rule of Law/Sexual Violence and the interagency network, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative – should be viewed as key resources for Member States to address this problem.

The United Nations maintains its commitment to “deliver as one” through the strategic and coordinated work of UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, a network of 13 UN entities, which I Chair. And in settings such as the DRC, Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire, UN Action has supported a comprehensive, system-wide response, aligned behind national efforts, in addition to strategic advocacy through the global Stop Rape Now campaign. We have also seen deep engagement by others, including NGOs and civil society actors on this issue.

The UN Team of Experts on Rule of Law/Sexual Violence has been working in several countries to build their capacity to address this crime and is now well established. The Team draws on the expertise of several United Nations agencies as well as a diverse roster of specialists, from legal practitioners to investigators and forensic experts. The Team is currently supporting initiatives of the Governments of Liberia, South Sudan, DRC, Colombia, Guinea and Somalia to address sexual violence. The TOE’s approach is grounded on the notion of national ownership; any recommendations made, and initiatives undertaken, must be fully supported by the governments and communities they are meant to

assist. Another important aspect of the TOE's work is that by carrying out in-depth assessments, and consulting with relevant and active parties on the ground, it identifies initiatives that are underway which should be strengthened. The TOE offers one way in which cooperative, consultative action can assist conflict and post-conflict states in developing the institutional capacity to address sexual violence crimes and demonstrates the extreme importance of national ownership on this issue. Over the last year the TOE has worked closely and strategically with the team from the UK's "Prevention of Sexual Violence Initiative", on joint visits and other areas of deep collaboration.

The Security Council has also called for the deployment of Women Protection Advisers to United Nations missions. The objective is to cultivate a cadre of professionals with a profile that combines operational security and protection expertise, gender analysis and human rights. The Women Protection Advisers will help to operationalise the relevant Security Council resolutions, including through providing advice to UN leadership in-country, and working with UN and other actors on the ground.

Sexual violence is a highly effective weapon of war – it not only humiliates, dominates, instills fear, and creates enduring ethnic, family and community divides, but it also demoralizes, degrades and dehumanizes its victims, crushing the human spirit. Yet, to date few ceasefire or peace agreements have made provisions for addressing conflict-related sexual violence. Therefore, our tool-kit now also includes guidance for mediators aimed at addressing this issue during on-going hostilities and at the beginning of a

mediation process, and in drafting and negotiating ceasefire and peace agreements. The guidance was developed by the UN Department of Political Affairs with the support of a number of UN Action partners, including my Office, and it outlines specific provisions for security arrangements and for justice and reparations.

If peacekeepers are to more effectively fulfill their protection of civilians mandates they must also be properly equipped. This includes practical knowledge on how to prevent and react appropriately to sexual violence crimes in their areas of operation. We are prioritizing training for peacekeepers and other military personnel. UN Action has developed an inventory of best-practices and innovations by peacekeepers to prevent sexual violence. On this basis, scenario-based training modules are being piloted. We also have a matrix of early-warning indicators that will help to better predict conflict-related sexual violence.

These developments, along with the Team of Experts, Women Protection Advisers, and the UK Initiative are among the mechanisms that can help ensure a more coordinated, robust system to tackle sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. None of these mechanisms existed five years ago, and they show what can be accomplished through a robust, coordinated response.

What is required going forward is to more systematically mainstream mandates, early-warning systems, ceasefire arrangements, provide better training of security forces in sexual

violence prevention, and ensure that these are seen as central to dealing with sexual violence, rather than an after-thought.

Enhancing justice systems and building the capacities of countries to address this crime is also essential.

Finally, the victims and survivors must be at the centre of all that we do. Stigma and victim blame needs to be effectively combated by communities, community leaders, and civil society. Irrespective of the laws on the books, if prevailing social norms and attitudes attack, blame, and shame the survivors rather than the perpetrators, the quality of their lives will not improve. This is among the many major challenges for us, and one which we must aim to address. I am hopeful that our combined efforts will help us finally close the book on this shameful chapter in world history.

Thank you.

[Words – 2365 = 20 minutes]