



## Position Paper

by the Office of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

to the House of Representatives of the Netherlands' Standing Committee  
on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

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### **Introduction**

Sexual violence during conflict, used as a tactic of war, terrorism and political repression is one of the most devastating forms of violence committed mainly against women and girls, but also men and boys. One of the world's *least-reported* and *least-condemned* crime, it has been shrouded in a conspiracy of silence that shields the perpetrators and isolates the victims. It is a crime that scars bodies, minds and futures inflicted with the intent to shred society's fabric, to dehumanize, destabilize the enemy and it does destroy not only the victims but their families and societies.

### **I. Evolution of mandate**

The past decade has ushered in a dramatic paradigm and perspective shift in the way sexual violence in conflict is addressed. This has catalyzed real change in three critical respects: namely, in terms of the *normative framework*, the *institutional arrangements*, and the *operational impact*.

#### ***a) Normative framework***

The Security Council adopted a comprehensive framework with its 10 resolutions on Women Peace and Security, including 5 specifically on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). The issue of sexual violence as a tactic of war was first elevated onto the agenda of the Security Council, through the unanimous adoption of resolution 1820 (2008) that recognizes it as a threat to collective security, an impediment to the restoration of peace, and a crime of concern to the international community as a whole. This new approach affirmed that there could be *no security without women's security*.

### b) *Institutional arrangements*

In 2009, the Security Council adopted resolution 1888, to equip the United Nations with new infrastructure to prevent and respond to the issue. This included the creation of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC), to provide coherent and strategic leadership to global efforts, including as Chair of the interagency coordination network, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict. It also established a Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, to strengthen institutional safeguards against impunity at the national level and called for Women Protection Advisers (or WPAs) to be deployed to the field, to enhance our monitoring, reporting, and response.

Subsequent resolutions reinforced the mandate. **Resolution 1960 (2010)** authorized new **monitoring, analysis, and reporting arrangements at country-level**, as part of a system of deepening the evidence-base for action, and pressuring parties to comply with international norms by listing or “*naming and shaming*” those credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of conflict-related sexual violence. **SCR 2106 (2013)** emphasized critical dimensions, such as **early warning and prevention**, and the need to **empower women and women’s civil society organizations** while **SCR 2331(2016)** condemned sexual violence as a **tactic of terrorism, including trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation**. Groundbreaking resolution **2467(2019)** called for a **holistic, survivor-centered approach in the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence** and recognized children born of sexual violence in conflict as rights-holders who endure both related and distinct harms from their mothers.

### c) *Operational impact*

Today the United Nations system is reaching and supporting thousands of survivors who had once been invisible and inaccessible. SCR 1888 and subsequent resolutions marked a historic turning point in the global recognition of the gravity of wartime rape. Having long been underreported, under-resourced, and overlooked, wartime sexual violence is now recognized as a relevant factor in security policy. Today, it is increasingly addressed in ceasefire agreements, mediation processes, peacekeeping mandates, sanctions citations, and transitional justice, ensuring more comprehensive and durable solutions. Accountability for sexual violence as an international crime has also taken increasing hold in international and national justice efforts with perpetrators, including at the highest level, sentenced for CRSV as a war crime, crime against humanity or element of Genocide including in national courts

## *Methodology of work*

The operational methodology of OSRSG-SVC is to secure commitments with national authorities in affected countries to prevent and address sexual violence in line with these Security Council resolutions. These commitments are anchored at the highest level and trigger a “whole of government” response through concrete implementation plans and strategies. To date, OSRSG-SVC has signed Joint Communiqués or Frameworks of Cooperation to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence with 12 countries.

Despite significant funding shortfalls, the two operational arms of the mandate, the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and the UN Action network, are supporting Governments to implement these formal agreements, reaching countless previously unreachable or invisible victims.

## *Overview of current trends and emerging concerns*

If civilians continue to suffer sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, it is not for a lack of international norms and institutions to protect them. It is because existing norms are inadequately implemented and enforced. It is because existing institutions are not backed with sustained political and financial support.

The gap between *commitments and compliance, resolutions and reality*, is evident on every page of the annual reports of the Secretary-general. The last annual reports of the Secretary-general paint a disturbing picture of sexual violence being used as a tactic of war, torture, terrorism, and political reprisal. For the year 2024, more than **4,500 cases** were documented, marking a **20 percent increase** from **2023**, which was itself a **50 percent increase** from the previous year. Sexual violence against children increased by a staggering **35 percent**, with incidents of gang-rape rising dramatically. Every year, we note the disproportionate impact on women and girls, who consistently account for **over 90 percent** of verified cases.

## *Prevention, Prosecution and Other Forms of Deterrence*

### *a) Prevention Framework*

Prevention permeates every action of OSRSG-SVC. A strategic priority of the SRSRSG has been prevention through i) *justice and accountability as a deterrent*; and ii) addressing the *root causes* of CRSV, including structural gender inequality and discrimination, poverty, and marginalization as its invisible drivers.

In September 2022, OSRSG-SVC launched a **Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence**, which aims to enhance both structural and operational prevention. A “road map” to guide prevention efforts, the Framework articulates a two-track approach that aims to both prevent sexual violence in the first instance, and to mitigate the secondary harms to affected individuals and communities that arise in its wake. It seeks to assist all relevant actors and stakeholders –especially governments, to improve and expand their programmatic efforts to better prevent CRSV. The Prevention Framework is currently being rolled out in a number of conflict-affected countries. While OSRSG-SVC has shifted the paradigm from inevitability to preventability, a corresponding shift is needed in terms of the public spending paradigm, to allocate resources equal to the scale of the challenge in order to roll out the Framework in more countries.

### ***b) Justice and accountability***

The Team of Experts on the Rule of Law is currently supporting the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of CRSV crimes under civilian and military justice systems, as well as transitional justice efforts and legislative reform in Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea (Conakry), South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine. Where political will is matched with resources, domestic accountability is possible for CRSV crimes with numerous convictions secured. At present however, requests for support from national authorities exceeds the Team’s capacity to respond.

The Team of Experts has developed important tools such as the **Model legislative provisions and guidance on investigation and prosecution of CRSV**, which contains state of the art legal provisions required to prosecute any form of sexual violence. In March 2026, it launched the **Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Prosecution Network** – a standing network of prosecutors to bolster prosecution for CRSV worldwide through peer-to-peer knowledge exchange platform, a jurisprudence database and informal judicial cooperation and troubleshooting.

### ***c) Sanctions***

To break the vicious cycle of violence and impunity, OSRSG-SVC ensures that sanctions and judicial accountability measures work in tandem. It does so through briefings and recommendations to Sanctions Committees for targeted sanctions in the form of travel bans, arms embargos, and the freezing of assets. Today, sexual violence is increasingly being included as a stand-alone criterion for the

designation of sanctions. The United Nations has fifteen sanctions regimes, nine of which now include CRSV as part of their designation criteria.

#### **d) Support to Survivors**

The survivor-centered approach to CRSV promoted by the mandate seeks to **empower the survivor by prioritizing her rights, needs and wishes**. It means ensuring that survivors have access to appropriate, accessible and good quality services including medical care, sexual and reproductive care, psychological and legal support as well as livelihood support.

**UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict** has been *truly transformative* in bringing these issues into focus through advocacy, knowledge-building, and catalytic, joint operations in the field. Through more than **60** life-changing projects spanning **18** conflict zones, UN Action has reached **thousands of survivors across Ukraine, DRC, Mali, South Sudan, Darfur, Somalia, and elsewhere**.

#### **Conclusion**

Eighty years since the adoption of the *UN Charter*, and a quarter of a century since the advent of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, *lifesaving programs* and justice initiatives are being defunded. **Today, demand far outstrips supply**. From Sudan to DRC, shelters for survivors are being shuttered, medical supplies for rape victims are running out and clinics are closing their doors. While needs are mounting, humanitarian assistance is being slashed. Women's frontline organizations are going from *underfunded* to *unfunded*. At this moment of backlash, **a failure to sustain investment would not only betray the survivors but further embolden the perpetrators**.

Similarly, whereas the level of CRSV is dramatically increasing globally, due to financial constraints and a shifting environment for both UN funding and official development assistance, the Team of Experts may have to reduce its work, risking a backslide into impunity.

How we meet this moment of multi-crisis is the *true test of our resolve*. While political dynamics and funding decisions may vary, the laws, rights, needs and mandate remain. We must remain steadfast to *spare succeeding generations from this scourge*.

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