

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG)  
on Sexual Violence in Conflict  
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**[Keynote speech: The Missing Peace Symposium on  
Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings]**

**(Washington, DC, 14 February 2013)**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends:  
Thank you for inviting me here today to address an issue  
which is not only dear to me, but one which I know is a  
priority to you as well – the fight against conflict-related  
sexual violence. A special thank you goes to Dr. Chantal  
de Jonge Oudraat, Executive Director of SIPRI North  
America, and Kathleen Kuehnast, Director of the Center  
for Gender and Peacebuilding with the United States  
Institute of Peace, for all the hard work in making this  
seminar happen. My office, the Office of the Special  
Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual  
Violence in Conflict, is happy to be a co-sponsor of this  
event, because I firmly believe that it will take the work of  
everyone to help eradicate this vile crime. This includes  
all of you who are here today – our partners in the  
research community, civil society and non-governmental  
organizations, the military, jurists and policymakers.**

**I also want to take this opportunity to highlight the fact that today is the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, which is – since 1998, and thanks to Eve Ensler – “V Day.” Today marks the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of V Day, which was started to demand an end to violence against women and girls, and in order to highlight the anniversary, V Day and Eve Ensler have asked one billion people across the planet to rise against violence against women. Eve herself is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today, the home of Dr. Denis Mukwege, another brave activist who survived an attempt on his life last year and is now back at work in Bukavu. For those of you who want to know more about Eve’s initiative, please go to [OneBillionRising.org](http://OneBillionRising.org). I will later today participate in an event at George Washington University to stand up to demand an end to violence to women and girls.**

**Conflict-related sexual violence is certainly not a new phenomenon. For too long, however, it has been considered ‘unspeakable,’ and an ignored crime. Whereas the history books have been silent about the horrific reality of rape in war, women and girls have been painfully aware of the war that has been waged not just on battlefields but on their bodies. The effects of sexual violence during and post conflict are devastating, and the consequences of rape and other forms of sexual violence often linger long after the conflict has ended. Mental and physical illness is common. Survivors of rape can face pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases including**

**HIV/AIDS, as well as other crippling repercussions. Depression, anxiety disorders, flashbacks, difficulties in reestablishing intimate relationships, and fear, are among the common long-term psychological impacts of this crime. A rape survivor from Bosnia captured the long-lasting consequences best when she said “They have taken my life without killing me.”**

**The Security Council recognized the disproportionate effect of armed conflict on women, and in response adopted a series of resolutions, among them Security Council Resolution 1325, and the follow-up resolutions 1820, 1888, and 1960. Security Council Resolution 1325 , adopted in 2000, provides the foundation for my work, by calling on States to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions at all levels of society, ending impunity for conflict-related sexual violence, and mainstreaming the gender perspective in all peace negotiations and peacebuilding efforts. The resolution also urges all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and sexual violence, in conflict.**

**Resolution 1820 was the first Security Council resolution to recognize conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of war and a matter of international peace and security that requires a peacekeeping, justice and services response. Resolution 1888 built upon the preceding resolutions by**

**creating my position to provide international leadership and advocacy on the issue, and requiring the sanctions committee of the Security Council to add criteria pertaining to rape and other acts of sexual violence to their deliberations. Lastly, resolution 1960 adopted in December 2010, calls for the establishment of monitoring, analysis and reporting mechanisms to enhance our knowledge of this crime as well as the naming and shaming of countries where sexual violence in conflict is taking place.**

**These Security Council resolutions have provided the international legal framework for us to begin tearing away at the root causes of sexual violence in conflict, and send a clear message to Governments that they have the primary moral and legal responsibility to protect their citizens and prevent this crime. But they also put perpetrators on notice, that gone are the days when attacking women in conflict was considered an unpreventable and unfortunate by-product of war. Now the word is out: if you commit this crime, we will investigate you, we will prosecute you, and we will punish you. There is no hiding place, and we will use all the tools at our disposal to find you and put a stop to your deeds – including through the application of travel bans, asset freezes and other sanctions. We are also trying to develop smarter sanctions for those who do not travel and do not have international assets.**

**With these resolutions, Security Council members also acknowledged the important role women play in society and how difficult it is to build a durable post-conflict peace if their rights have been violated. The resolutions recognize that around the world women are the fabric that holds families and communities together. For example, in Africa, where I come from and which accounts for nearly 70 per cent of today's conflicts, women make up over half of the continent's population, but they represent more than 80 per cent of the informal economy, and produce more than 70 per cent of the continent's food. They have supported their families in times of war and have helped rebuild their countries in the aftermath of conflict. Attacks against women have not only ruined lives, they have devastated economies, undermined faith in governments and stifled stability on the continent.**

**Although sexual violence disproportionately affects women and girls, it is important to remember that it is not a gender issue; also men and boys are victims of this crime. And the shame and stigma surrounding rape and other forms of sexual violence done to men and boys is as common as when perpetrated against women and girls. My Office has received reports from Libya and Syria about sexual violence being used against men and boys, typically to extract intelligence and often taking place in prisons and detention centres.**

**I assumed my role as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict in September 2012, and one of my key responsibilities is to act as an advocate for this issue worldwide and to raise awareness about the devastating impacts of this violent crime. Mainstreaming women's rights in the work of all national, regional and international institutions is an important first step on the road to eradicating sexual violence in conflict – because if women are seen as second-class citizens in peace time, their rights will not be respected when there is unrest. If they are viewed as unimportant before war breaks out, they will be treated as expendable during conflict.**

**Of course, addressing conflict-related sexual violence ultimately must be about preventing it from happening. To strive towards the goal of the eradication of sexual violence in conflict, I have established a six point agenda:**

**First, we believe that there must be an end to impunity for perpetrators and justice for victims. Rape during war must be taken seriously and condemned as a war crime, not written off as an inevitable by-product of war. Ultimately, prosecution is also prevention – because it sends a clear message to perpetrators that there is no hiding place, that wherever you go we will go after you to make sure that you are prosecuted, and it can also serve as a deterrent to would-be perpetrators.**

**Second, protection and empowerment are twin pillars of the solution to sexual violence. This means that sexual violence must be treated as a serious peace and security issue that warrants a security response, and women must not be seen just as victims but as stakeholders who will be included in all measures taken to combat sexual violence.**

**Third, we must engage political leaders to strengthen the implementation of the Security Council resolutions that are the foundations of our mandate. To make this a reality, we need active scrutiny from the Security Council to ensure that these resolutions are being implemented by Member States and they are held accountable for their commitments. It is time that rape is treated as a security issue with real consequences, not a second-class crime that happens to second-class citizens.**

**Fourth, there is a need for consistency and coordination in the response from the international community to this crime. A rape victim doesn't know – and should not have to know – about Security Council resolutions. They simply know whether their country and the UN are providing the security they need and the justice they deserve. There also needs to be a holistic response to victims of sexual violence as this crime affects every aspect of their lives. Ultimately, we need to have standardized best practices that are used in responding to sexual violence and its aftermath.**

**Fifth, the world needs to recognize rape as a tactic of war. It is important to understand what it means when rape is used as a tool of war and peoples' bodies battlegrounds where soldiers fight for military gain or political advantage. This war tactic is as effective as any bomb and as destructive as any mine, and it needs to be addressed with the same determination as any other deadly weapon used in war.**

**Lastly, I have added an emphasis on national ownership, leadership and responsibility. Solutions cannot be imposed from the outside. What is required more than anything else is a change in the attitudes of everyone from political leaders, to activists, to journalists, to citizens. Every sector of society needs to understand the devastating impact of this scourge, and be determined to end it. To this end, I will deepen my engagement with government officials, religious leaders, NGOs, and rebel groups.**

**The passage of Resolution 1325, and the subsequent resolutions that reinforce it, signaled a sea change in how the international community treats sexual violence in conflict. We now have the global legal framework in place to tackle this age old problem, but that is not enough. Any piece of legislation – national or international – is only as good as its implementation. And a normative framework accomplishes nothing if States do not have the technical capacity and political will to implement the resolutions.**



**The United Nations and the international community can condemn this crime in the Security Council, but it means little if it makes no difference for the individuals on the ground.**

**My office therefore also works through a Team of Experts on the Rule of Law – whose Team Leader Innocent Zahinda, by the way, will join us on Saturday for the last panel – to build the technical capacity of police, prosecutors and judiciaries in countries we work with, so that at the national level they can investigate, prosecute and adjudicate these crimes and bring justice to victims. We also provide training for peacekeepers and national security personnel to enhance the skills needed for the prevention of sexual violence and the protection of civilian populations from this rights abuse.**

**It is ultimately the legal and moral responsibility of governments to end impunity for this crime by bringing the perpetrators to justice, because not all cases can be tried through special tribunals such as the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) or the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). We have to enhance capacity at the national level so that States not only can carry out this function, but also ensure future redress to survivors in a sustainable manner. Looking at Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, there were an estimated 50,000 cases of sexual violence during the war, including women being**

held in rape camps as sex slaves. Yet, nearly 20 years after the end of the war, there have only been a few dozen trials at the national and international levels combined. States, assisted by the UN and the international community, must take ownership of this issue and lead from the front.

Going after the perpetrators and bringing justice to survivors must begin early – ideally already by getting political commitments during the conflict. Women must have a seat at the table during any peace process, and they must have a say in all measures taken. Because women’s security cannot be separated from the overall security of a country, which is why women must be involved at every level of political and public life, helping to craft solutions to this problem as envisioned by resolution 1325. Post conflict, governments must make ‘mental disarmament’ a key component of the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process. This means that when soldiers and ex-combatants put down their arms they must also let go of their old ways of thinking; for example the assumption that rape is part of the spoils of war or that it is acceptable to use the bodies of civilians as battlegrounds. This message must be heard, loud and clear, from the highest levels of the government to the foot soldiers in the field, who commit most of the atrocities. Finally, Security Sector Reform (SSR) efforts have to take a comprehensive approach which also adequately

**addresses the concerns of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.**

**Often times, as a condition of peace accords, ex-combatants are integrated into national armies and police forces. We must not send potential war time perpetrators of sexual violence back into society without vetting them and prosecuting those credibly suspected of human right violations, because it conveys the message that this is acceptable. Instead, it is the government's duty to hold people who commit this crime accountable, and to change the mindset of ex-combatants who saw this crime condoned in the context of war.**

**The best practices and policy recommendations I would make here today include strengthening national justice systems and legal frameworks to end impunity, increasing access to justice for victims as part of the process of reparation and redress, and raising awareness about this issue so that you change the attitudes, perceptions and behaviors that are at the root of this problem. If you do not value women in peacetime, you will not value them in war. If women are seen as second-class citizens when there is no conflict, their rights will not be respected when there is unrest.**

**I know that putting an end to the scourge of sexual violence in conflict is not impossible. You may ask what makes me so confident that we can reach our goal. It is**

**because I stand before you as someone who knows what it means to be vulnerable, to be written off because I was born a girl and to be targeted for being a woman who stood up and spoke out. My mother, a woman who could not read or write, swore that if she had a child, that child would have an education. And she risked everything to make sure that her only child, her daughter, got the education she never received herself because of her gender.**

**– I know, first-hand, what it is like to be threatened by rebels who vowed to rape and kill me, to silence me and stop me from working to restore peace and democracy in my country.**

**– I know how it feels to look your child in the eye and tell him to run for his life because he may not make it out alive.**

**– I know what it means to have your home looted and destroyed, and for you to lose all your life's possessions.**

**– I know, first-hand, what it feels like to flee your country with nothing but the clothes on your back in the hopes of making it to safety and seeking asylum in a land not your own.**

**The fact that I can stand here today to tell you my story after all I have seen and lived through is what makes me**

**confident that we can make a difference, and that ending sexual violence in conflict is not an unrealistic dream, but an attainable goal and that my daughter will have opportunities that I never had.**

**The road ahead of us is long and it will not be easy, but those things worth fighting for are rarely easy to attain. I firmly believe that sexual violence is not unfortunate collateral damage, but a crime that can be stamped out through education, empowerment, equality, justice, and security. We have the tools at our disposal, now we need to harness the will to make the end of sexual violence in conflict a reality.**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends, in closing I would like to ask for your unrelenting help to break what has traditionally been called ‘history’s greatest silence,’ to speak up against this crime, to support people who are working to build peace and security and to continue to shine a light on this crime against humanity that undermines peace and violates human rights. To paraphrase Laura Liswood, who is with the Council of Women World Leaders: “We are like snowflakes. One alone will melt, but together, we can stop traffic.” Thank you.**