To: **H.E. William Hague, Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom**
             Ms. Angelina Jolie, Special Envoy for the UN High Commissioner for
             Refugees
From: **Missing Peace Young Scholar Network (gender@usip.org)**
Subject: **Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict**
Date: **9 June 2014**

We congratulate the UK Government's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) and the convening of a Global Summit to raise awareness, improve the lives of survivors, increase accountability, and prevent sexual violence in conflict.

We are members of the Missing Peace Young Scholar Network: early-career researchers from a wide range of academic backgrounds, committed to understanding and ending sexual violence in war. The Network was created in 2013 by a consortium of research institutes in the United States and Europe: The United States Institute of Peace (USIP); The Human Rights Center at the University of California Berkeley; The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO); and Women In International Security (WIIS).

The Missing Peace Young Scholar Network met in Washington, D.C. in May 2014 to examine the state of our knowledge regarding the patterns, causes and consequences of sexual violence in war. We identified major myths, gaps and challenges and priorities for the way ahead. http://www.usip.org/events/ending-sexual-violence-in-conflict

We share them with you, knowing you appreciate the value of evidence-based policy and programming on such a complex issue like conflict-related sexual violence.

Myths about sexual violence in conflict are prevalent in policy discourse. Three stand out:

Myth 1: Sexual violence in conflict is ubiquitous and inevitable.
Our research shows that sexual violence is neither ubiquitous nor inevitable. Over 40% of conflicts during 1989-2010 had no reports of sexual violence by any group. Several armed groups, including the Salvadoran rebels and the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, have avoided sexual violence almost completely. In addition, it is important to recognize that sexual violence involves more than rape and includes sexual torture, sexual humiliation and harassment, and forced marriage.

Myth 2: Sexual violence is a weapon of war.
Our research shows that sexual violence in conflict has many causes, from individual opportunism to malignant socialization practices to military strategy. We strongly urge policy-makers not to assume that wartime sexual violence is always a "weapon of war" that can be solved with increased prosecutions and harsher punishments. We understand the importance of accountability and consequences, but effective sexual violence policies that seek to prevent such behavior must look beyond punishing sexual violence and must address the causes for such violence.

Our research has also shown that there is no single profile of perpetrators, or of victims. Women and men of all ages and backgrounds perpetrate and suffer, sexual violence. Both rebel groups and government militaries have perpetrated sexual violence. Finally, it must be stressed that even in wartime, intimate partners -- not fighters -- are the most common perpetrators of sexual violence. In sum, sexual violence is a symptom of larger structural issues in society such as gender inequality

Myth 3: Sexual violence is a product of war and will end when peace arrives.
Research has shown that sexual violence has deep roots in the pre-conflict phase that are intensified during conflict and perpetuated in the post-conflict phase. Similarly, research has indicated a strong correlation between domestic violence and violence within societies.

We have also identified a number of gaps and challenges in our research:

Challenge 1: Underreporting
All gender-based violence, including sexual violence in conflict, is vastly underreported. Across several surveys, at least a fifth of women in conflict-affected populations reported having suffered sexual violence -- and an unknown, but potentially large, proportion of victims chose not to report their experiences in surveys. Official sources are even more incomplete: across both conflict and non-conflict settings, only 7% of women who reported experiencing sexual violence on a survey said that they had also told an official source (police/legal, medical, or social services) about the violence.

Challenge 2: Causes and patterns
While we have acquired some understanding of sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups, we have little understanding about the motivations and patterns of sexual violence perpetrated by other groups and individuals as a result we have little understanding what works to prevent sexual violence in conflict. We also need to know more about how differences between armed organizations (both state and non-state) contribute to differences in patterns of sexual violence by these groups. We require a better understanding of the dynamics of sexual violence against

men and boys. While awareness of this issue has increased, existing data are woefully inadequate.

Challenge 3: Services for survivors
Health services are essential for the well-being of sexual assault survivors. Health services are also key entry points for other essential services, including psychosocial services and the legal process. Unfortunately, in most conflict affected settings even minimal health services for sexual violence survivors are absent.

Finally, we have identified three key research priorities moving forward:

Priority 1: Data
Without reliable, accurate data on patterns of sexual violence, we cannot determine when policies for prevention and treatment are effective. Improvements in baseline data can be partly achieved by using clear, shared definitions, implementing screening processes where possible, and increasing deployment of population-based survey methods.

Priority 2: Evaluations
We need rigorous evaluations of existing and new programs to establish what works, and to avoid unintended harms. Shared definitions are crucial in reporting the incidence of sexual violence and in evaluating programs' effectiveness. The UK Department for International Development's current commitment to supporting research in this area is encouraging, but more can be done.

Priority 3: UNSCR 1325
Mainstreaming the principles of UN Security Council 1325 is one key pathway to help end and prevent sexual violence. For example, our research has shown that Peace operations are a key venue for prevention efforts. Indeed, troop contributor countries that have endorsed UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and its follow-on resolutions, including UNSCR 1820 on sexual violence, are less likely to engage in sexual exploitation and abuse than peacekeepers from countries who have not endorsed these resolutions. Research has also shown that the greater the number of female peacekeepers, the greater the number of people willing to report sexual abuse. In this regard, adequate training for all security forces, the presence of women in leadership roles, and increased contact between women in security forces and local communities are all key changes that can improve services provided to survivors of sexual violence and prevention efforts.

We are all too aware of the difficulties that policy-makers face in attempting to respond to a problem as complex as sexual violence in conflict. We applaud the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative and the organizers of the Global Summit for their commitment to tackling these

difficult issues, and we look forward to working with policy-makers to support efforts that will go beyond punishment and retribution to effectively treat, prevent, and ultimately end sexual violence in conflict.

Respectfully yours,

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