

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
26 June 2023

Original: English

Letter dated 26 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In its capacity as President of the Security Council for July 2023, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland intends to organize an open debate on the theme “Conflict-related sexual violence: promoting implementation of Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence”, to be held at 10 a.m. on Friday, 14 July 2023, in the Security Council Chamber.

In order to guide the discussions on this topic, the United Kingdom has prepared the attached concept note (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Barbara Woodward



Annex to the letter dated 26 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the theme “Conflict-related sexual violence: promoting implementation of Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence”, to be held on Friday, 14 July 2023

Fifteen years ago, the Security Council unanimously adopted Security Council resolution [1820 \(2008\)](#), by which it resolved to eliminate conflict-related sexual violence and end impunity for those crimes. In the resolution, the Council called upon States to respond in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The Security Council continued to adopt resolutions in which it condemned all acts of sexual violence committed against civilians in armed conflicts, the vast majority of whom are women and children. After the adoption of resolution [1820 \(2008\)](#), resolutions [1888 \(2009\)](#), [1960 \(2010\)](#), [2106 \(2013\)](#), [2122 \(2013\)](#), [2242 \(2015\)](#), [2331 \(2016\)](#) and, finally, [2467 \(2019\)](#), were adopted. Improvements have been made in how the United Nations and States respond to sexual violence in conflict, particularly through the mandate to establish the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict by resolution [1888 \(2009\)](#). This was one in a series of resolutions in which sexual violence was recognized as a tactic of war and terrorism, a threat to security and an impediment to the restoration of peace. The Special Representative undertakes critical efforts to enhance compliance by States with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, strengthen the implementation of the rule of law and facilitate redress for survivors, which is enhanced by the work of women’s protection advisers deployed to settings affected by conflict-related sexual violence.

Across the globe, however, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and their advocates do not see the action or accountability promised in these resolutions. Impunity is the norm, rather than the exception. States bear the primary responsibility for preventing and addressing sexual violence, yet compliance lags and monitoring efforts are inconsistent. Despite the Security Council’s robust normative framework on sexual violence in conflict, and the comprehensive nature of States’ obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, civilians have been exposed to alarming levels of sexual violence in settings affected by conflict. This annual open debate comes at a time when implementation has fallen behind the curve.

The debate will consider: what has the Security Council called for with regard to conflict-related sexual violence and what has been done to implement this? Where are the gaps in implementation and what steps can be taken to address them? There is unanimous agreement that survivors deserve justice and redress, but there are steps that States must take in order to deliver on this. From implementing international obligations in national legislation, to training military forces on responses to conflict-related sexual violence, it is incumbent upon States to end the culture of impunity around conflict-related sexual violence.

Background

Conflict-related sexual violence

Conflict-related sexual violence is an abhorrent crime that devastates the lives of survivors, their families and communities. It¹ may be used by armed combatants for strategic objectives, it may be tolerated as a common practice by commanders and it may be committed opportunistically by combatants and civilians due to a breakdown of the rule of law and protective systems during conflict. It happens in the lead-up to and during armed conflict, as well as in post-conflict settings. It is rooted in entrenched gender inequality and harmful social norms, which create a conducive environment for the commission of sexual violence. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict-related sexual violence, but men and boys are also targeted, and perpetrators may target LGBT+ people.

Security Council response to conflict-related sexual violence

The Security Council addresses situations in which civilians are at risk from armed conflict or humanitarian crises. In its resolution [1820 \(2008\)](#), the Council identified conflict-related sexual violence as a self-standing peace and security issue requiring specific policy and operational responses. In subsequent resolutions, the Council has addressed specific country situations and context-specific steps to address conflict-related sexual violence. Thematic resolutions have also responded to the full scale of protection risks in conflict. For example, the Council has required all parties to an armed conflict to cease acts of sexual violence with immediate effect (resolutions [1888 \(2009\)](#) and [1889 \(2009\)](#)). The Council recalls commitments that States have made, reaffirms obligations and notes recommendations (e.g. under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women).

Through its resolutions, the Security Council has established a normative framework for preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. For example, to prevent conflict-related sexual violence, States should incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations and should train troops on the categorical prohibition of all forms of sexual violence against civilians. States can also reform national laws to ensure that they offer comprehensive protection for all civilians. The Council may also use sanctions to prevent and deter the reoccurrence of conflict-related sexual violence. In resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#), the Council urged existing sanctions committees to impose targeted sanctions on those who had perpetrated and directed conflict-related sexual violence. In 2021, the Council sanctioned Sultan Zabin for violent reprisals, including sexual violence, against politically active women in Yemen.

The Council has also called for justice and accountability for conflict-related sexual violence. This includes setting out in resolutions that States should promptly investigate and prosecute conflict-related sexual violence, should refrain from using amnesty provisions for conflict-related sexual violence and should enact the legal and judicial reforms necessary to ensure that survivors have access to justice. States should also ensure that critical support and services for survivors are available, including by strengthening the capacity of national institutions and civil society and by providing reparations and redress measures for survivors, where appropriate.

¹ The term “conflict-related sexual violence”, as used in the present report, refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict (see [S/2021/312](#)).

In resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#), the Council recognized the need for a survivor-centred approach to preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. Survivors play a vital role in advocating for action on conflict-related sexual violence and helping to shape efforts to address it. In the resolution, the Council encouraged an inclusive approach, including by addressing the specific needs of different groups of survivors, building the capacity of women-led and survivor-led organizations and ensuring the full and meaningful participation of survivors in transitional justice processes.

The Security Council's engagement with civil society is critical to its ability to understand the threats to civilians on the ground, including from conflict-related sexual violence. Civil society's analysis of the local contexts in which it works benefits the Council, as do the recommendations it provides on protection risks and challenges. However, survivors and civil society leaders often face reprisals, including from State authorities, for supporting survivors, speaking up about conflict-related sexual violence, or seeking justice. The 2022 annual report on conflict-related sexual violence notes that in a number of Security Council contexts, civilian demonstrators and protesters were raped for the purpose of repression and intimidation.

The 2022 report identifies 17 countries in which conflict-related sexual violence was taking place. It sets out how State authorities, terrorist groups, non-State armed groups and transnational criminal networks were deploying the strategic use of sexual violence against civilians in conflict settings. It also notes the proliferation of armed actors in conflict settings, including private contractors, militias and self-defence groups, that has resulted in increased violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including sexual violence.

States bear the primary responsibility for implementing the Security Council's normative framework on conflict-related sexual violence, but the reports of the Secretary-General point to extremely low levels of compliance by parties to conflict.² The majority of listed parties are persistent perpetrators who have appeared in the reports of the Secretary-General for at least five years and have faced no remedial action. There is an urgent need to close the gap between the standards and commitments set out by the Security Council and the reality on the ground in conflict settings.

Guiding questions

- What tangible steps can States take to increase compliance with international legal frameworks and translate their obligations into national legislation? How can States strengthen rule of law institutions to investigate, prosecute and sanction violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including sexual violence?
- How can States implement specific training to address conflict-related sexual violence and implement gender-responsive security sector reform? How can States change cultures of impunity within their military forces?
- How can the Security Council, other international bodies and regional organizations respond to States that fail to hold perpetrators to account? How can the same entities hold non-State actors implicated in committing, commanding or condoning conflict-related sexual violence to account?

² See [S/2021/312](#) and [S/2023/413](#).

- How can States best leverage existing legal frameworks, as well as United Nations mechanisms and tools – including sanctions regimes – to prevent and deter the commission of sexual violence in conflict settings?
- How can the international community engage survivors in efforts to close the gap between normative frameworks and reality on the ground, including regarding survivor care and recovery?
- How can the Security Council, other international bodies and regional organizations prevent reprisals against survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and activists – including those who brief the Security Council – and hold States who perpetrate these acts accountable?

Format, briefers and participation

The open debate will be chaired by the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and Minister of State for the United Kingdom, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon.

The following speakers will brief the Security Council:

- Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
- Civil society briefer
- Civil society briefer

Member States wishing to participate in person should inscribe their names on the list of speakers through the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE. The inscription for the list of speakers will open at 9.30 a.m. on the third working day preceding the date of the meeting (11 July). A letter addressed to the President of the Security Council, duly signed by the Permanent Representative or the Chargé d'affaires a.i. and containing a request for participation in accordance with rule 37 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council must be uploaded to the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE. In order to guarantee the participation of as many Member States as possible, statements should not exceed three minutes.
