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Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence as a Threat to Peace and Security

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I warmly welcome your participation in this event, and extend special thanks to the Government of Australia for their support. I would like to take this opportunity to describe how sexual violence is a security threat that demands a security response; and how the *Inventory* captures *untold stories* of concrete efforts to address it.

Everyone in this room has a role to play in making Resolutions 1820 and 1888 a reality. I am convinced that *where there's a political will, there's a way*. When I accepted the role of Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, I said that this was not “*mission impossible*”, but “*mission irresistible*”. In peacekeeping, the “protection of civilians” has sometimes been called “the impossible mandate”. It might then seem that the protection of civilians from sexual violence – a widespread yet often invisible crime – is doubly impossible for peacekeepers, with their many other preoccupations. But the *Inventory* suggests otherwise. It captures a range of activities being undertaken at the *tactical level*, and outlines elements for an effective response at the *strategic level*.

There are some stories that never make the headlines. One of these lesser-known stories is that peacekeepers have developed enterprising practices – despite logistical and resource constraints – rather than be bystanders to atrocity. They have taken proactive steps to combat sexual violence, used to create a climate of terror in which *nothing is sacred and no one is safe*. Peacekeepers have played a role in saying: *Not on our watch*.

In Darfur, for example, firewood patrols and the construction of fuel-efficient stoves have reduced the number of rapes. If women are unable to safely access fields, markets, or water-points, if girls are unable to safely get to school, socio-economic recovery will be stalled. In casting a shadow over the activities most essential to community life, rape impedes recovery. It limits the very participation in public life that the foundational Resolution, 1325, identified as essential to durable peace.

The document before you cites many examples of rape as a security threat: as a vector of HIV during the Rwandan genocide; to shred the social fabric in DRC or Timor-Leste; in camps designed for the purpose of forced impregnation in Bosnia; and as a tool of political repression in Guinea. Most recently, we have read about appalling gang-rapes in connection with ethnic unrest in Kyrgyzstan. And yet, from Nepal to DRC, from Haiti to Liberia, rape has been *slowest* to register on the security radar, and ranked *lowest* on a hierarchy of war-time horrors.

While the rape of one woman in one country is called a crime, the rape of hundreds of thousands in another is called the “culture”. Because it is so pervasive in war-time, it is dismissed as normal and inevitable. *Exactly the opposite is true.* Acts of sexual violence on this scale and level of organization are not only *crimes against the victim* – they are *crimes against humanity*. This is everyone’s business, from gender experts to Generals; from local police to international peacekeepers.

The *Inventory* is thus part of a broader process of expanding the constituency for action. But while this may be “everyone’s business”, it cannot be “business as usual”. It’s critical that commanders and Security Council members, during their field visits, establish a dialogue with women’s groups. Without this, they will not have a complete picture of the situation. Patrolling patterns must be adapted to places where women are unsafe – because women are not “innately vulnerable”; they are placed *at risk* by certain security factors and actors. Efforts to avert predictable risks, such as rape when women leave camps to collect firewood, must be routinely included in contingency plans.

There has long been a *vicious cycle* of impunity for sexual violence, leading to vengeance, delayed reconciliation, and an inability of communities to reconstitute. But we can push back. Since the process of compiling the *Inventory* began in May 2008, we have seen a *virtuous cycle* of increased attention leading to more concerted action on the ground.

We now need to change the mind-sets of those who treat sexual violence as a private *tragedy*, rather than a *tactic*. Those who say: what happens in a “private hut” has nothing to do with security, or that rape is just part of war’s “collateral damage”. In fact, *every* rape – even in the midst of war – is a crime that is commanded, condoned or condemned. Our common enemy is the self-serving myth that rape is inevitable. This protects the perpetrators, shields their commanders, and allows world leaders to shrug off sexual violence as the random acts of a few renegades.

In reality, sexual violence is often used by “spoilers” to subvert social and political processes. They outsmart us if we ignore the *method* in this *madness*, rather than countering their strategy with a strategic response. This means that the most naïve thing we can do is succumb to the temptation to be cynical. The *easiest* response is to call this *too complex*. It is tempting to fixate on the horror stories, rather than the modest but motivating stories of actions that have made a

difference. Resolution 1820 challenges us to “debunk the myths” that fuel sexual violence. The *Inventory* is a good start in debunking the myth that rape is inevitable. That’s why it is so important that these promising practices – to directly or indirectly combat sexual violence – have been assembled for the first time in the 60-year history of peacekeeping.

To move from best intentions to best practice, peacekeepers must be armed with examples and information to help them operate more effectively. While we are all too familiar with the brutalities that play out in war-zones, we also have a responsibility to highlight initiatives that have impact. This shows the world that rape can be stopped if we build the *skill* and the *will* to respond. We are not *creating* expectations – the issue and the expectations exist.

In the DRC, for example, the UN estimates that over 200,000 women have been raped during 12 years of war. I have met some of the mothers, sisters and daughters behind this mind-numbing figure. Not one of these women described rape as a part of her culture. The proliferation of rape – like the proliferation of guns or grenades – came with the war. So we must be clear: there are no “rape cultures”, only cultures of violence and cultures of impunity.

Increasingly, it is understood that a situation is *not* secure when the war enters women’s bedrooms by night or their markets by day. In eastern DRC, I observed how MONUC market escorts have improved women’s sense of security and enabled them to resume trade, which contributes to economic development. Such practice cannot remain *ad hoc*. It must be standardized, incentivized and made part of our institutional memory.

Likewise, in Liberia I heard how the use of sexual violence during the civil war left a profound imprint on society. Rape is the number one reported crime in monthly police statistics. Today, UNMIL is supporting the transition from a “total war” – fought on the bodies of women and children – to a “total peace”, in which *all* civilians are safe. I joined a night patrol with the Indian all-female Formed Police Unit – a powerful symbol that, in the new Liberia, women are protectors and role models. These peacekeepers have initiated self-defense training for women and girls in schools and community centers. I also visited Bong County, where an UNMIL Battalion provides free medical services to the community, and helps fight male unemployment – one of the structural drivers of violence against women – through support to farming initiatives.

For peacekeepers, helping to deter sexual violence is not just “the right thing to do”, it is essential to credibility and mission success. It is part of transforming the once all-male domain of peacekeeping into an institution poised to promote women’s right to security *on their terms*.

I will end by saying that, ten years into the Women, Peace and Security agenda, we have learnt so much, but standardized so little. This *Inventory* stimulates reflection on what is working and could be replicated; what is not working and should be reassessed; and what critical gaps remain. Peacekeepers are neither a panacea, nor a substitute for action by national authorities, but they *are* one piece of the overall protection puzzle. The *Inventory* marks the start – not the end – of an

effort to build a “bank” of good practices as part of our investment in women’s security, which we know pays dividends for durable peace. It is conceived as a continual work in progress, to inform training and planning. This is fitting, as security is always a *process*, not an end state.

When future generations look back on what happened to the women of Darfur or DRC, they may well ask: *What did you do?* That is a question we need to ask of ourselves and each other. The practices in the *Inventory* show that steps are being taken. But we can all play a part by disseminating and adding to this resource. That way, from the moment their boots touch the ground, tomorrow’s peacekeepers will have a reference that explains this issue in *operational*, not *theoretical*, terms. There will be guidelines and mission-wide strategies on the protection of civilians. There will be scenarios in their pre-deployment training to prepare them to recognize sexual violence and react appropriately.

On a personal note, I am inspired by those who serve in peacekeeping missions. I see this tool as supporting their daily work – work that can deter acts of rape and murder that continue to make the headlines, in a way their modest but important interventions rarely do.

Thank you.