

UN Officials Express Grave Concern over Rising Levels of Sexual Violence in Somalia

Joint press release by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten

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The Special Representatives for Children and Armed Conflict and on Sexual Violence in Conflict are appalled by the alarming increase in the scale and severity of sexual violence in Somalia, as documented in two recent reports of the United Nations Secretary-General.

“The heightened levels of conflict-related sexual violence in Somalia demand urgent attention and action. We urge all parties to the conflict in Somalia to immediately cease these violations and comply with their obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as their commitments with the United Nations pursuant to relevant Security Council resolutions,” the two Special Representatives emphasized.

In 2020, 400 civilians, primarily girls were victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by all parties to the conflict in Somalia. This represents a staggering increase of almost 80 per cent compared to 2019. In the first quarter of 2021, over 100 cases of sexual violence against girls were verified by the United Nations. Often, perpetrators exploited the vulnerability of displaced girls, targeting them when they left camps to perform domestic chores. Sexual violence was closely linked with the prevailing insecurity in Somalia, marked by political tensions in the run-up to national elections, inter-communal clashes related to land-based disputes, and a surge in Al-Shabaab’s activities, which intensified during the climate of uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the temporary suspension of security and judicial services, the pandemic also disrupted access to education and services for survivors.

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The two UN Officials are alarmed by the significant increase in the number of cases of sexual violence which has doubled and are attributed to Al-Shabaab, which continues to use sexual violence and forced marriage as tactics of domination in areas under their de facto control, forcing many families to flee their land. The two UN Officials also noted with concern the high number of violations perpetrated by clan militia, which has almost tripled over the past year, and are linked to a proliferation of small arms and light weapons. In the vast majority of cases, the perpetrators remain unidentified, which perpetuates the vicious cycle of impunity and impedes access to redress and reparations for survivors.

The two UN Officials also expressed serious concern that over 15 per cent of all cases of sexual violence verified, were attributed to the Government security forces. Both the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force, as well as regional forces, committed acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and children.

Special Representatives Patten and Gamba urge the Government of Somalia to take concrete measures to end and prevent the recurrence of sexual violence against women and children, while expediting the implementation of protection commitments, including at the Federal Member State level. They highlight the importance of implementing the 2012 action plans on ending and preventing the recruitment or use of children as soldiers and on the killing and maiming of children, as well as the 2019 road map, which contains provisions such as the establishment of mechanisms for the prevention of and response to sexual violence against children. They further urge the Government to pursue the full and effective implementation of the Joint Communiqué on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence signed in 2013 by swiftly adopting a new national action plan on ending sexual violence in conflict, which will reinforce the policy of zero tolerance within the security sector and help to strengthen institutional capacity to effectively prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence.

Both UN Officials call on Somali lawmakers to strengthen its legislative framework to better protect the rights of women and children, highlighting that sexual violence thrives in environments where legislation is weak and allow perpetrators to walk free, and survivors receive little or no support. “The Somali authorities must send a strong and clear signal of hope to survivors and deterrence to perpetrators and potential perpetrators. They should fast-track the endorsement and enactment of the 2017 Child Rights Bill as well as the re-introduction and enactment of the 2018 Sexual Offences Bill to ensure that its legislation to address all forms of sexual violence is comprehensive and in line with Somalia’s international and regional human rights commitments,” the two Special Representatives stated.

Note to editors:

- In 2020, the United Nations, through the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA), verified conflict-related sexual violence against 419 civilians (400 girls, 12 women and 7 boys) in Somalia.

See also:

[Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict \(S/2021/437\)](#)

[Report of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict \(S/2021/312\)](#)

- The violation of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children was added to the listing of the Somali Federal Defense and Police Forces in the annexes (Annex I, List B) to the Secretary-General’s annual report on children and armed conflict (A/75/873–S/2021/437), in addition to the existing listing for the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children. In the same report, Al-Shabaab remains listed for all five violations that trigger the listing of a party, including sexual violence.
- The Somali National Army, the Somali Police Force and allied militia, and the Puntland Forces are listed State actors in the annexes to the Secretary-General’s annual report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2021/312). In the same report, Al-Shabaab remains listed as a non-State actor for conflict-related sexual violence.

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