



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

A war waged on the bodies of women and girls: following visit to Chad, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, calls for the immediate cessation of sexual violence by parties to the conflict in Sudan and urges for funding to support survivors

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New York, 24 July 2024: At the invitation of the Government, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Pramila Patten led an official visit to Chad between 14 and 18 July 2024, to assess the situation in the Ouaddaï Region, where more than 620,000 refugees have sought protection, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, who have fled the ongoing hostilities in Sudan.

“Following disturbing reports of a large number of cases of conflict-related sexual violence in the Eastern provinces of Chad, I visited the country to witness first-hand the scale of the crisis resulting from the influx of civilians from Sudan, comprised of around 90 per cent women and children. I commend the Chadian authorities for their generosity to this desperate population, as well as their steadfast leadership and political will in facing this unprecedented humanitarian crisis, as they continue to receive and host thousands of civilians fleeing the violence of war”, stated Special Representative Patten.

In N’Djamena, SRSG Patten met with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Human Rights, Women and Children, Health, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity, and Public Security and Immigration. She also met with the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, the United Nations Country Team, gender-based violence service providers and civil society organizations, including women-led organizations.

In Adré and Farchana, she met with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence who had fled Sudan and courageously shared their harrowing accounts of rampant and brutal sexual violence. Refugee women highlighted how sexual violence remains a prominent feature of the ongoing conflict in Sudan. SRSG Patten heard accounts of rape and other forms of sexual violence involving multiple perpetrators; the use of sexual violence against women and girls that was ethnically motivated; instances of rape in front of family members; trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation of women and girls; abductions of women to extort ransom payments from their family members; and the targeting of women activists and first-responders including those providing assistance and support to survivors of sexual violence. In some instances, survivors and witnesses identified armed men belonging to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and its allied militias as the presumed perpetrators of these grave crimes.

Women from the refugee and host communities and frontline responders shared their insights about the challenges in accessing essential services, including any form of legal assistance or access to justice, and livelihood support. These sentiments were echoed by other interlocutors who briefed on the humanitarian situation, emphasizing that the lack of specialized care, including mental health care and trauma counselling, insufficient personnel, and ill-equipped

health facilities continued to create barriers to adequate support. “In any conflict, sexual violence is a chronically underreported crime, and this case is no exception. Survivors of sexual violence have not been able to report their cases or access life-saving assistance due to the magnitude of the crisis, the distance to and paucity of health structures, as well shame and stigma, rooted in harmful social norms. In most cases, women who were subjected to sexual violence in Sudan or during their flight, only sought medical assistance when they realized they were pregnant”, added SRSG Patten.

Moreover, the lack of security in the camps, the circulation of arms and the presence of armed men, further expose women and girls to various forms of gender-based violence. United Nations entities have put in place measures to mitigate these risks, including lighting in camps and fuel-efficient stoves, which require additional funding to be scaled-up.

Despite significant efforts by the Chadian authorities, the United Nations, international and national organizations to respond to the crisis, the urgent needs of affected populations, including survivors of sexual violence, remain largely unmet. Humanitarian actors report that on average, more than 3,200 persons are seeking refuge in Eastern Chad every week, since the onset of the conflict, overwhelming the existing response capacities. The ongoing hostilities in El Fasher and the looming famine in Sudan risk increasing the flow of refugee populations into Chad. Against this backdrop, the UN Humanitarian Response Plan has only received 21 per cent of the required funding to meet its planned objectives, resulting in severe deprivation and unmet needs for food, water, shelter and medical assistance.

“I call on the international donor community to redouble their contribution to the situation in Chad to support those in desperate need of shelter, security and assistance. We must respond with unwavering solidarity to conflict-affected populations, including survivors of sexual violence, and must urgently alleviate their suffering. I reiterate my call to all parties to the conflict to comply with international human rights and humanitarian law, and in particular, to guarantee immediate and complete cessation of all violence against civilians, including sexual violence” stated the Special Representative.

For media inquiries, please contact:

Ms. Géraldine Boezio, Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict
Tel: +1 917 367 3306 Email: geraldine.boezio@un.org

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