



**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

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**Statement by Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women,  
its causes and consequences**

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Conflict-related violence against women**

***Introduction***

Mr. President, Madam High Commissioner, distinguished delegates, representatives of the United Nations and the NGO community, ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour to appear again before you today as part of a panel to discuss conflict-related violence against women. I am pleased to see that the scope of this afternoon's discussion has been couched in broad terms which should allow us to address the various manifestations of violence against women and its ramifications in times of conflict. My speech will primarily recall the analysis and observations made by this mandate on this topic over the past 16 years.

At the outset, let me reiterate that this mandate has addressed violence against women as operating on a continuum in terms of both location and time. It has looked at all spheres of human interaction, ranging from the family, the immediate community and the larger society, the State sphere as well as the transnational arena. It has also addressed violence against women, its causes and consequences, in times of peace, in conflict, post-conflict, transitions, consolidation and development.

As the background note of this panel identified, conflict situations exacerbate existing inequalities between women and men and puts women and girls at heightened risk of physical, emotional and psychological violence. In this respect, General

Recommendation No. 9 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women states that “wars, armed conflicts, and the occupation of territories often lead to increased prostitution, trafficking in women and sexual assault of women, which require specific physical and protective measures”.

At the same time as the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325, a landmark in the Security Council’s efforts towards greater protection of women’s human rights in time of conflict, the first mandate-holder on violence against women, devoted a full report to examining violence against women perpetrated and/or condoned by the State during times of armed conflict (E/CN.4/2001/73). She strongly affirmed that violence against women during wartime continued to involve horrendous crimes that must shock the conscience of humanity.

The report illustrated how women and girls were raped by government forces and non-State actors, by police responsible for their protection, by refugee camp and border guards, by neighbours, local politicians, and sometimes family members under threat of death. They were maimed or sexually mutilated, and often later killed or left to die. Women were subjected to humiliating strip searches, forced to parade or dance naked in front of soldiers or in public, and to perform domestic chores while nude. Women and girls were forced into “marriages” with soldiers and held in sexual slavery. Women and girls were also abducted or held captive, forced to do domestic work - cleaning, cooking, serving - or other labour, in addition to any sexual “services” that might be demanded of them.

The report also paid special attention to the specific risks faced by girl children during armed conflict. Girls face many if not all of the risks that are experienced by women during armed conflict; they are often victims of rape and other sexual violence, and may be abducted and forced to serve a number of distinct and overlapping roles, such as porters, cooks, combatants and sexual slaves. Girls who are orphaned or separated from their families during armed conflict are also particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, including being trafficked into forced prostitution. They may also find

themselves responsible for the shelter and feeding of younger siblings, while encountering numerous obstacles that make these tasks difficult because of their age and gender.

Women and girls often experience similar consequences due to the violence. These include the broader physical and mental impact of violence; the contracting of sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, as well as numerous complications related to pregnancy and abortion; the difficulty of reintegration into their families and communities once the conflict is over, because they have been sexually abused or forced to be wives of enemy forces. The impact and consequences of the conflict and the interpersonal violence does have different nuances for girl children, because of their stage of development. Despite the specific needs and experiences of girls in armed conflict, girls are often the last priority when it comes to the distribution of humanitarian aid and their needs are often neglected in the formulation of demobilization and reintegration programmes.

During conflicts, women are often trafficked across borders to sexually service combatants to the armed conflict. Armed conflict increases the risk of women and girls being abducted and forced into sexual slavery and/or forced prostitution. Although most conflicts are now internal ones, women and girls may be transported across international borders, often to camps of armed groups located in the territory of a neighbouring State. At least some of these abductions result in women and girls being sold to others and trafficked to other regions or countries.

Furthermore it has become abundantly clear that internally displaced persons (IDPs) - the majority of whom are women and children- are particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse. The Guiding Principles specifically recognize the particular concerns of IDP women and children. They call on States to provide protection for women and girls, including by safeguarding them from gender-specific violence and by ensuring their rights to equal access to services and participation in assistance programmes. As the Special Rapporteur on IDPs stated: "Women and girls can be especially vulnerable to forcible displacement, are at further risk during the displacement phase itself and often

remain exposed to serious human rights violations, even once a solution has been ostensibly found to their displacement. This continuous vulnerability often stems from their pre-existing situation, as well as the more general social and economic status of women in the community" (A/HRC/16/43).

Evidence from around the world seems to suggest that armed conflict in a region and militarization processes, including the ready availability of small weapons and the demobilization of frustrated soldiers, lead to an increased tolerance of violence in the society which may also result in increased violence against women and girls. When the conflict has been brought to an end, women often face an escalation in certain gender based violence, including domestic violence, rape, and trafficking into forced prostitution. Unfortunately many of the peace agreements, and the processes of reconstruction after the conflict, do not take note of these considerations.

The report by this mandate in 2000 also highlighted the ongoing violence and discrimination that women face in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process, and noted that although women make up the majority of heads of household in most post-conflict situations, their families and their needs are rarely adequately factored into international donor and reconstruction programmes, or the distribution of humanitarian aid. The lack of initiatives by the donor community to support projects that specifically include women, compound historical discrimination in many societies and can ultimately compel women to turn to exploitative and abusive situations as the only means of supporting their family.

This mandate has also conducted a number of visits to countries in conflict throughout the years. These visits have corroborated the thematic analysis conducted in relation to violence against women in conflict situation.

The first mandate-holder, during her visit to Afghanistan in 1999, found that women were reportedly subjected to a wide range of human rights abuses, including instances of rape, sexual assault, forced prostitution and forced marriage. She collected reports indicating

that young women were raped and abducted during fighting and noted the “rise in violence against women among the refugee population, including child abuse, prostitution and trafficking”. (E/CN.4/2006/61/Add.5). The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan also received reports of abduction of women and girls and of the families of young girls and women being forced to marry them to their abductor or to give them a large sum of money instead. When families refused, they took the women and girls away by force” (E/CN.4/2000/33).

During a joint fact-finding mission in November 1999 to East Timor, together with the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture, the findings included evidence of widespread violence against women in the country which military command knew, or had reason to know (A/54/660 of 10 December 1999).

Following her visit to Sierra Leone in 2001, the first mandate-holder found that women and girls had been subjected to human rights abuses and grave breaches of international humanitarian law, including killing, amputation, forced displacement, forced conscription, and the looting and destruction of their property perpetrated by all parties to the armed conflict (E/CN.4/2002/83/Add.2). As women, they were subjected to gender-specific abuses, including rape, sexual slavery and forced marriages to members of the various factions. Sexual violence was directed against women of all ages, including very young girls. She also highlighted her concern about the appalling conditions in the camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and noted that the failure to investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible for rape and other forms of gender-based violence had contributed to an environment of impunity that perpetuated violence against women in Sierra Leone, including rape and domestic violence.

The report of the 2001 visit to Colombia noted the impact of internal conflict on women, the widespread and systematic nature of gender-based violence and the various forms of it that were suffered. She noted that women were abducted by armed men, detained for a time in conditions of sexual slavery, raped and made to perform domestic chores.

Women were targeted for being the female relatives of the “other” side. After being raped some women were sexually mutilated before being killed. She highlighted the particular experience of female combatants who suffered sexual abuse and infringements of their reproductive rights, and also the appalling situation faced by female internally displaced persons.

My predecessor, visited the Darfur region of Sudan in 2004 where she found a grave human crisis exacerbated by insecurity; mutual mistrust between the people and the Government; and lack of effective follow-up regarding allegations of human rights violations, including rape of women and girls. She also reported that female IDPs endured security concerns, the trauma of rape and loss, health problems and heightened risk of HIV/AIDS infection, domestic violence and poverty.

The 2007 report on the visit to the DRC, noted that all of the armed forces fighting in the three-year war had committed serious abuses against women and frequently targeted women for rape and other sexual violence. Some women and girls were held as sexual slaves and reportedly some detained men, women and children were subjected to sexual violence (A/HRC/7/6/Add.4). Three years later, pursuant to the mandate entrusted to me and other six other special procedures mandate-holders by the Human Rights Council, I reported that violence against women, in particular rape and gang rape committed by both men in uniform and civilians, remained of serious concern, including in areas not affected by armed conflict. Laws and practices that discriminated against women remained in place and, along with impunity, remained a root cause of violence against women in the country (A/HRC/13/63).

As demonstrated by this mandate through its work, violence against women has remained a pervasive feature of many conflict situations over the past 16 years. In times of conflict States are not exempted from fulfilling their human rights obligation, including the due diligence obligation to prevent violence against women from happening in the first place, and to protect and provide remedies to women who have been subjected to violence. The impunity of State and non-State actors for violations of human rights and humanitarian

law is an issue that deserves serious international consideration. The great majority of conflicts today are internal ones involving armed opposition forces fighting against government units. Although crimes against women are often committed by government forces, non-State actors also commit serious abuses against women and girls and often target the civilian population, including in particular women and children, as a tactic of war. Non-State actors cannot be exempted from abiding by international human rights standards. The international community must not stop being shocked by the serious violations of the rights of women in all settings and in a variety of situations, whether peace or conflict related.

The Human Rights Council and its mechanisms should continue placing the protection of women's rights, including their right to a life free from violence, in times of peace and conflict, high on the agenda. This Council and its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights, have consistently and strongly condemned violence against women and girls committed in situations of armed conflict and have consistently called for effective responses to these violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and for the elimination of impunity for such violence.

The Human Rights Council and the Security Council should, thus, continue to strive for strengthened protection of women's rights in times of conflict in complementary ways which would, for example, ensure close collaboration and coordination between the mechanisms they have established for this purpose, including the mandate of the SRSG on sexual violence in conflict, the Team of Experts, the specific tasks given to UN peace keeping operations and the human rights mechanisms of this Council.

Mr. President,

The momentum brought about, not only by positive developments in the Human Rights and Security Councils, but also by the unrelenting work of civil society organisations and other actors, should be maintained and strengthened by sustained action. Words must be followed by concrete deeds to bring change to the lived realities of women and girls.

Violence, exacerbated in times of conflict, is a manifestation of pre-existing discrimination and must be eliminated. The right to be free from all forms of violence, both public and private must become a reality in times of peace, conflict and post-conflict.

Thank you for your attention.