

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Rhoda Misaka
At the UN Security Council Open Debate
on Sexual Violence in Conflict
25^h April 2014**

Madam President, UN Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Security Council at the debate on women, peace and security from a civil society perspective. I speak today on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.¹ I am also here in my capacity as a founding member of the South Sudanese Diaspora Association, and member of EVE Organization for Women Development. EVE is an organization based in Juba, South Sudan and is committed to empowering women and raising awareness about women, peace and security issues, including sexual and gender-based violence during conflict.

I speak here today with a heavy heart, as I continue to receive reports from my family, friends and my organization in South Sudan that the violence in our country has continued to increase. Women in the UNMISS IDP camp in Bor, which was attacked last week, are traumatized and devastated, and say they feel like they are sitting there waiting to die. I am here with you in the Security Council today, but I live in fear of what will happen next in my country, and to my family. Last week in Bentiu, hundreds of men, women, and children were killed, and men are being pushed to rape women of different ethnicity.

The sexual violence we have experienced in South Sudan is indicative of the larger systemic crisis throughout the world, in countries such as Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Colombia, the DRC, Syria and Myanmar. I want to acknowledge the work of civil society groups who are not present here, but are fighting every day to prevent, document, and respond to such crimes. I am also deeply honored to acknowledge the civil society groups who are here today, including Ms. Naw K'nyaw Paw, another women's human rights defender who is working with sexual violence survivors in Myanmar.

Today, we call on all relevant actors, including Member States, the Security Council, United Nations, and non-state actors, to take a greater role in the prevention and treatment of this atrocity and threat to international peace and security. I will discuss six areas of serious concern related to the situation in South Sudan and sexual violence in all conflicts, including in those situations that are not in the focus of the international community.

Ending Impunity

The Security Council, Member States and the United Nations must take on leadership roles and actively advocate for ending impunity, and promoting investigation, documentation and accountability. At this moment in South Sudan, mechanisms are being erected to investigate atrocities, including the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism of the Cessation and Hostilities Agreement. In addition, the African Union Commission of Inquiry is currently in South Sudan and will be investigating sexual violence in conflict as part of its mandate. In all cases of conflict, in all such mechanisms, sexual violence in conflict must be on the list of violations to be documented. Without documentation, there will be no accountability.

In South Sudan, women are discriminated against in laws that do not meet internationally accepted standards of human and individual rights. Weak judicial systems lead to low rate of arrests and convictions. Security and judicial professionals should receive stronger training on sexual and gender-based violence. Alleged perpetrators must be prosecuted, including those with command responsibility, and women should be active agents in judicial processes and sectors.

Comprehensive Services for Survivors

We call on Member States and UN agencies to ensure survivors of sexual violence can access, in a timely manner, non-discriminatory and comprehensive health services. These include, as referenced in Security Council resolution 2122, the full range of sexual and reproductive health services, HIV awareness and response, and access to safe abortion in

¹The NGOWG is comprised of Amnesty International; Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights; Femmes Africa Solidarité; Global Action to Prevent War; Global Justice Center; Human Rights Watch; The Institute for Inclusive Security; International Action Network on Small Arms; International Alert; International Rescue Committee; Refugees International; International Women's Program of the Open Society Foundations; Social Science Research Council; Women's Refugee Commission; Women's Action for New Directions; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

accordance with international humanitarian law. Equally important are psychosocial, legal, livelihood assistance and other multi-sectoral services, and appropriate services specifically for adolescent girls.

In South Sudan, survivors of sexual violence face many barriers to all these services. One challenge is that survivors do not report abuses early enough due to fear and stigma. They also face systemic barriers such as poor infrastructure, and the lack of health and psychosocial services. It is vitally important that the humanitarian community receive additional technical and financial resources to meet the specific needs of women and girls. In turn, the humanitarian community must ensure that the needs of women and girls are met when services are provided.

Prohibition of Amnesties

Ceasefire agreements and peace agreements must not provide amnesty for sexual violence, as is stipulated in numerous Security Council resolutions. This in turn must not be undermined in subsequent post-conflict mechanisms, including legislative and constitutional provisions. Amnesty provisions make accountability for sexual violence crimes impossible, breach international law, and do nothing to deter perpetrators of sexual violence.

Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Negotiations

All women must have the opportunity to participate, and to have their views and needs represented, in decision-making processes. This requires outreach to women who have been marginalized, including young women, indigenous women, those who are displaced, and those with disabilities. Many of these groups are at increased risk of being targeted for conflict-related sexual violence.

Although there are six women in the formal negotiations in South Sudan, as a result of heavy advocacy by women's groups and the international community, women are still under-represented in the peace process. Seats at the peace table should not be reserved only for parties to the conflict. This is why my organization has developed a statement to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), with signatories from across South Sudan and Africa, calling for women's networks and organizations to be part of the peace process.

Mission Mandates

The Security Council has long recognized, most recently in its resolution 2122, that UN mission mandates should include strong and comprehensive language on all aspects of the women, peace and security agenda. Following armed attacks in the UNMISS camp in Bor, we have received reports from women living in the camp, who do not feel safe and are requesting more protection and evacuation. Given the UNMISS mandate, and the large number of women seeking refuge in UNMISS compounds and IDP camps, UNMISS must take full measures to guarantee the rights of South Sudanese women and ensure their protection. In this vein, the Security Council should urge UNMISS to ensure vetting, pre or post-deployment training and sensitization of all troops on gender-based violence and protection.

In addition, we recognize that UN bodies and international humanitarian organizations need unhindered access to conflict areas. The denial of access cannot serve as an excuse for perpetrators and governments to avoid their accountability for crimes of sexual violence.

Root Causes

In South Sudan, all we want is peace. The prevention of conflict and its underlying causes must be given priority, rather than waiting until it is too late. The proliferation of arms and light weapons adds to the insecurity of girls and women. We therefore call on the Security Council and all actors to focus on gender-sensitive disarmament and conflict prevention, including early warning. Member States should ratify and fully implement the Arms Trade Treaty, particularly in relation to the prevention of gender-based violence.

Finally, we remind Member States of the importance of creating space and support for independent civil society. Local women's rights groups often have the strategic and political knowledge to end sexual violence, and are usually the first to respond to survivors. All too often, civil society is the only voice to address ongoing sexual violence in forgotten and neglected conflicts.

I leave you with the story of Sarah, who was interviewed by our organization in Bentiu, where her uncle was killed in front of her, her mother was burned, and Sarah herself was raped. She also told us of ten other women who were shot because they refused to be raped.

Members of the international community, we need you to work with us in South Sudan. Do not forget our country, our people, our women.

Thank you for your attention.