

Mr. President, Excellencies, Civil Society colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. My name is Marwa Mohamed. I am a Libyan human rights defender who has been working on peace and justice in Libya for over 10 years. Today, I speak in my capacity as Head of Advocacy and Outreach at Lawyers for Justice in Libya. We are a UK-registered, Libyan organisation working on and in Libya to promote human rights, the rule of law and access to justice.

The 2011 uprising brought Libyans, for the first time, a profound sense of belonging and ownership over our collective future. Civil society flourished and began to take many shapes and forms.

But this growing movement was disrupted by increased intimidation and violence. The assassination of women's rights advocate Salwa Bugaighis in 2014, who was shot dead in her own home, was a turning point. From that moment on, civil society began to withdraw from public space, from political leadership and from activism. The recent abduction and disappearance of parliamentarian Seham Sergewa is a stark illustration of how complete impunity for attacks and intimidation of activists, and women in particular, has only emboldened perpetrators.

Those of us who choose to fight for peace and justice in Libya continue to face repression. I address you today as a member of Libya's civil society who is committed to rebuilding the future of our country, one that is based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. This is only possible if we work together.

My statement will focus on three main areas of concern: the gendered impact of the conflict, the widespread use of enforced disappearances and torture; and targeting of civilians and civilian objects.

What happened to Salwa and Seham illustrates broader patterns of the risks that human rights defenders in general and women, in particular, face for their activism in Libya. Since 2014, women human rights defenders have been routinely subjected to gender-based violence and threats, including physical assault, abductions, sexual violence, as well as gender-related slurs and smear campaigns designed to undermine us and undercut the legitimacy of our work. Such attacks have also increased on social media.

The threat of reprisals and retaliation for participating in politics or carrying out human rights work, combined with a lack of accountability for such acts, or specific steps by the UN-backed government to address these risks, has effectively forced women out of public life.

The proliferation of weapons despite the UN arms embargo, the breakdown of state institutions, and the general state of lawlessness has had a disproportional impact on Libyan women's security and freedom of movement. Women living in conflict-affected areas are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including sexual harassment, rape, and abductions. According to 1,300 first hand interviews conducted by OHCHR and UNSMIL, the majority of migrant and refugee women and girls have been systematically gang-raped by traffickers or have witnessed others taken away to be abused along their journeys. Migrant and refugee women, who are held in detention centres run entirely by male guards, are also strip-searched and exposed to sexual violence, including rape. SGBV on the whole, however, remains underreported.

The state's inability to control the activities of armed groups and militias has left women vulnerable, with no accountability for attacks against them. In the absence of a central state authority, women have had to take their safety into their own hands, by adhering to a specific dress code, traveling with a male guardian, or restricting movements to daytime. This has resulted in profound limitations on their freedom of movement and their ability to engage fully in public life.

Given the gendered impact of the conflict on Libyan women, it is especially critical that women are meaningfully included in all political talks to bring sustainable peace to Libya. Tokenistic representation or inclusion at stages when women can have no influence over the outcome undermines the effectiveness of any peace agreement.

Since 2011, enforced disappearances have become a widespread pattern across Libya, although they are poorly documented due to fear of reprisals. The only official numbers from the Ministry of Interior are from 2017 stating that 257 people disappeared in March and April in Tripoli alone. The figure is likely higher across Libya and over the nine

years since the conflict started. Militias routinely abduct individuals from their homes, streets, checkpoints, and places of work, holding them in unofficial places of detention with no access to lawyers, their families, or judicial oversight, and usually subjecting them to torture and other ill-treatment. UNSMIL has reported that some of the disappeared have been held for up to two years. Others have never been seen again.

This was most recently illustrated by the enforced disappearance of parliamentarian and women's rights activist Seham Sergewa, who had expressed political views critical of the LNA's offensive on Tripoli and had called for the formation of a civilian state. Seham was abducted by armed militias from her home in Benghazi on 17 July 2019. Her fate remains unknown.

Seham's case is one among many. Enforced disappearances are used in Libya to deter any kind of dissent and send a message that there are those above the law who can operate with total impunity. Without accountability, the cycle will continue.

Since the LNA's offensive on Tripoli began, indiscriminate targeting of civilians and civilian objects have been documented by LFJL, activists on the ground and other international organizations. These include attacks on Matiga airport and medical personnel and facilities, in violation of international humanitarian law (IHL), which may amount to war crimes.

According to the World Health Organisation, since April 2019, 106 civilians have been killed, 294 civilians injured and more than 10,000 people displaced across Libya. Further, according to UNSMIL, as of 15 August, there have been over 37 attacks on health workers and facilities, with 19 hospitals attacked, 11 medical personnel killed in clear violation of IHL.

Migrant detention centres have also not been spared. An aerial attack on an official migrant and refugee detention centre in Tajoura left 46 dead and at least 130 wounded in July.

Mr. President, as Secretary General Guterres himself has warned in his latest report on the situation, Libya is likely to erupt into "a full civil war" unless action is taken immediately. It is a test of this Council's credibility to act now.

We therefore call on the Security Council to:

- Demand an immediate cease-fire to end the current conflict and ensure that all civilians are protected from attacks, including SGBV. Stop the transfer of weapons that are being used to perpetuate the violence. All Member States must uphold and enforce the UN embargo on all weapons transfers and sales to Libya. The absence of a clear message from the Security Council has led to an intensified stockpiling of weapons on both sides at an alarming rate.
- Demand accountability from all parties to the conflict. Call on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to initiate investigations into possible war crimes, and crimes against humanity.
- Protect women human rights defenders. Libyan authorities must ensure an enabling environment for all women, including women human rights defenders, peacebuilders, and political leaders.
- Demand that Libyan authorities, UNSMIL, and all parties to the conflict ensure full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all phases of the peace and reconciliation process. UNSMIL's active and public support for substantive engagement of women in conflict and post-conflict dialogue would send a clear message that women's participation and contribution is not only vital, but necessary.
- Ensure greater preventative and responsive measures by the Libyan authorities to protect women and girls, including migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, from all forms of gender-based violence in conflict and have access to emergency response with the necessary support from UNSMIL.

Mr. President, in conclusion, while warring parties are fighting for power, it is the Libyan people, the civilians on the ground who are paying the ultimate price, many with their lives. It is their voices that should guide your actions by bringing an end to this conflict and restoring peace in Libya.

Thank you.