

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Amina Megheirbi
At the UN Security Council Open Debate
on Women, Peace and Security
23rd February 2012**

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Security Council. I am speaking on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, a civil society coalition that advocates for the equal and full participation of women in all efforts to create and maintain peace and security.¹ This work includes the promotion of women's human rights and combatting sexual violence. I am also here in my capacity as President of Attawasul Association, a Libyan NGO in Benghazi working on women's empowerment. I have lived through the violence imposed on the Libyan people by a brutal dictator for 42 years. This includes the intensified aggression after the February 17th revolution, in which sexual violence was used as a weapon.

We appreciate the ongoing work by numerous actors to combat violence against women. This includes the efforts of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We welcome the analysis and recommendations in the latest Secretary-General's Report on conflict-related sexual violence.

As this report makes clear, sexual violence is often used as a weapon to torture, terrorize, and threaten peace. It is important to remember that each paragraph of this report represents human beings: women, men, children, and communities affected by this threat to peace and security. This includes individuals from my community, who, like most victims have not and likely will not receive proper services, protection, acknowledgement, justice, or accountability. This is a collective failure of the international community to effectively respond to this threat.

Effectively addressing conflict-related sexual violence requires powerful and urgent leadership at all levels - international, regional, and local. This leadership is essential across the UN system and from every Member State.

Today, I will address three key points where this leadership is essential:

- Prioritizing prevention;
- Ensuring a survivor-centric approach; and
- Strengthening justice and accountability .

First and foremost, **prevention of conflict-related sexual violence is paramount, and must be your priority on this issue here in the Security Council.** The Security Council itself has underlined the importance of prevention. After the mass rapes in Walikale, Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2010, the Council stated "all possible steps should be taken to prevent such outrages in the future." Given the political, technical and financial resources required,

¹ The NGOWG serves as a bridge between women's human rights defenders working in conflict-affected situations and policy-makers at UN Headquarters, and 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; United Methodist Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries – United Methodist Church; Women's Refugee Commission; Women's Action for New Directions; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

can we say that “all possible steps” have been taken to prevent conflict-related sexual violence? Can we say that to women, girls, and their communities in Eastern DRC, or to the survivors in my country, Libya? Can we say that to the rest of the world? Have Member States and the UN invested all available political, technical, and financial resources to prevent further atrocities? If not, why not?

We urge all actors to address the root causes of sexual violence. These root causes include gender inequality, political exclusion, social and cultural stigma, militarization and the proliferation of arms. Women’s human rights and full participation cannot be ignored. In fact, women’s full and equal participation is fundamental to addressing these root causes, and therefore to the prevention of sexual violence in conflict.

Second, when prevention efforts fail, survivors must be the priority of all service provision and protection. This **survivor-centric approach** must encompass the provision of medical, psychosocial, legal and other services to survivors, as well as effective avenues for reparations and redress. We support the recommendation of the Secretary-General’s Report in this regard, and we strongly call on all actors to make this a reality. Service and protection strategies must be designed in full consultation with women and affected communities. Particular attention must be paid to the rights and concerns of women and girls who are often at increased risk in displacement settings, as the current report notes in many cases, including Somalia, Darfur in Sudan, and Sri Lanka.

Third, survivors demand nothing less than **justice and an end to impunity**. Accountability for crimes of sexual violence must be included at every stage, from cease fire agreements to all aspects of post-conflict reconstruction. This is central to both preventing future crimes of sexual violence against women, and to the healing of societies. At both the national and international levels, security sectors and judicial systems must address the culture of impunity for these crimes. Measures must include improved vetting of reintegrated soldiers, and bringing suspected perpetrators to justice in domestic courts where possible, or through referrals of situations to the International Criminal Court and other international courts for prosecution. Where these systems are failing survivors, comprehensive reforms should be mandatory. Maintaining the full dignity of survivors must be at the core of all of these processes.

As a Libyan, I want to emphasize the necessity of holding all parties involved in any act of sexual violence accountable, and that they be prosecuted accordingly. This includes those politicians and military commanders who ordered or permitted such acts as a weapon of war, as well as those who committed the crime.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I would like to state our concern regarding all situations where women’s rights continue to be violated. On conflict-related sexual violence specifically, we note that the Secretary-General’s **current report** does not reference a number of relevant situations where sexual violence has been perpetrated. These include Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Haiti, among others. We urge the Secretary-General to take all measures to ensure that all relevant countries are included in future reports. Furthermore, we condemn the perpetration of sexual exploitation and abuse, which is all too often committed with impunity.

As civil society, we are often at the forefront of combatting sexual violence from the grassroots to the international level. We encourage all actors to support civil society at all levels in all areas of this work. Further, in your own work in the Security Council, as a Member State, or in the United Nations, you should ensure that you are working to fulfill the obligations of resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960. This includes ensuring all country reports and mandate renewals are truly responsive to the protection and promotion of women’s human rights.

Mr. President, in conclusion, I as a Libyan woman and on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security ask you, your Security Council colleagues, and all other members of the international community to take the urgent action on conflict-related sexual violence that we have outlined here today: prioritizing prevention; ensuring a survivor-centric approach; and strengthening justice and accountability efforts.

Thank you.