

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Ms. Hamsatu Allamin
UN Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict
15th April 2015**

Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning,

Today, I wish to draw global attention to the plight of women and girls in Nigeria's North East, a region that has been the center of a 2 year insurgency. Yesterday we marked the one year anniversary of the abduction of 276 Chibok girls. Of those, 219 remain missing even as the whole world has been asking our authorities to #BringBackOurGirls. The most recent numbers estimate approximately 2000 women and girls have been kidnapped by armed men since the start of 2014 - a much higher number than is receiving attention. They are often stripped naked so they cannot escape, forced into marriage and repeatedly raped.

On behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security,¹ as the Regional Manager of the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Program, and as a National Executive Member of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria, I am here to implore the Security Council and the international community to develop integrated solutions in partnership with women's groups and service providers. These solutions should: prevent conflict-related sexual violence; protect those at risk; provide comprehensive support to survivors; promote gender perspectives and women's voices; prosecute those responsible; and take action to strengthen rights of women and girls. Additionally, women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes must be a core component of any effort to effectively reduce and address incidents of conflict-related sexual violence.

Fighting extremism and ending violent conflicts must prioritize the promotion of state and global responsibilities to uphold international standards. This means ensuring accountability for human rights violations including all forms of sexual and gender based violence and enshrining gender equality at all levels.

State and non-state armed groups in my country, as in Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Burma and many other places are perpetrating acts of sexual and gender-based violence, on women, girls, men and boys. This has a devastating impact on sustainable peace and development. In Iraq, sexual and gender based violence committed by the extremist group Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) may amount to crimes against humanity. In Nigeria, witnesses last month reported that dozens of women who had previously been forced to marry insurgents were killed by their "husbands" to prevent them from either escaping or being rescued and eventually marrying soldiers or other so called "non-believers".

Efforts to prevent all forms of conflict related violence will not succeed without women's leadership and participation. Women human rights defenders and local civil society representatives in northeastern Nigeria are negotiating and mediating with armed groups, rescuing women and girls in the occupied territories and providing rescued survivors with assistance and support. I cannot stress enough the importance of coupling international efforts with those that are already happening at the grassroots level.

¹ The NGOWG is comprised of Amnesty International; Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights; Femmes Africa Solidarité; Global Justice Center; Human Rights Watch; The Institute for Inclusive Security; International Rescue Committee; MADRE; Refugees International; Open Society Foundations; Women's Refugee Commission; Women's Action for New Directions; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Community organizations must be involved in the provision of immediate and long-term support services and be supported to create safe spaces where women and girls can openly discuss their experiences and share their coping strategies. Often survivors and their families do not want to be identified, they fear retribution and stigmatization, and they feel alone. Coordination is also required to ensure specialized and confidential survivor-centered medical, psychosocial and economic support is available. Member States must also commit to removing barriers that prevent many survivors, particularly those who are displaced, from accessing non-discriminatory medical care required by their condition.

In addition, I urge the Security Council and Member States to ensure the establishment of comprehensive justice strategies which ensure investigations, reporting, and reparation provisions. These must be in line with international humanitarian and human rights law and comply with ethical and safety guidelines. Immunity must not be granted for sexual and gender based violence or other serious human rights violations whether in legislation or peace agreements. In Nigeria, a formal process is also needed to determine the total number of women and girls who have been abducted. Those still missing must be found and supported and the perpetrators and sponsors of these crimes must be brought to justice.

Out of the horrific ordeals we have suffered and witnessed has come the transformation of Nigerian women as peace builders. Women who were the most marginalized, poor and illiterate are mobilizing. They are active citizens who speak on community radio and establishing safe spaces and peace clubs which train other women and survivors, equipping them with life skills and linking them to microfinance bodies. The international community should support these growing efforts.

In Nigeria, organizations such as my own are advocating and building awareness for the full integration of UN Security Resolution 1325 and the women, peace and security agenda into domestic policies and legislation. We additionally need international attention and support for the implementation and resourcing of Nigeria's National Action Plan. Member States should ensure that development assistance to Nigeria helps increase educational opportunities for girls, combats gender and other forms of discrimination, keeps schools safe, builds the capacity of women leaders in girls' education, improves health care for women and girls, and supports and empowers local women civil society. Women's full and meaningful participation must be prioritized in all efforts aimed at addressing the underlying causes of conflict-related sexual violence and broader conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict rebuilding strategies.

Such strategies must also address the proliferation of drugs, corruption, and lack of rule of law and curb the flow of small arms and light weapons which has been linked to conflict related sexual violence. States should ratify and implement the Arms Trade Treaty, which requires exporting parties to take into account the risk of conventional arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence.

It is important to acknowledge the recent peaceful elections in Nigeria that brought hope for stability. The incoming President must address the general system and institutional failures in Nigeria. Permit me to use this opportunity to also call on the Security Council and all Member States to encourage the Nigerian and neighboring governments to explore alternative options of dialogue with the non-violent members of the insurgency, including those that were forcibly conscripted, who are yearning for peace and an end to violence. I am sure many are willing to lay down their arms, but lack an alternative.

We have all seen the violence in my country spill over into neighboring states. Women have not been included and their voices have been marginalized from discussions relating to peace and security. My country and particularly the region I live in will only experience peace, security and stability when it empowers women to be active partners in society.

Thank You.