

**Security Council**

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20 March 2023

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Letter dated 20 March 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Group on the situation in Afghanistan (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland
to the United Nations

(Signed) Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**
Permanent Representative of the
United Arab Emirates to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the
United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 20 March 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council: summary of the meeting on the situation in Afghanistan, held on 26 January 2023

On 26 January 2023, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Afghanistan. The members were briefed by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Markus Potzel, accompanied by colleagues from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations provided by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from members of the Security Council

Members of the Security Council asked whether there were signs of hope that any of the restrictions on women's rights, including the most recent ones affecting all aid operations, would be reversed and whether there were differences in implementation across different sectors or provinces. Council members also asked whether there were paths to restore a political track that would not confer any legitimacy or recognition on the Taliban or possibilities of engaging at the subnational level in certain provinces to mitigate the negative impact of the restrictions. Members inquired about the level of consultation by the United Nations with Afghan women and the request for mechanisms or platforms to ensure that women can safely and regularly engage with the Taliban and with international actors. Other questions revolved around the potential impact on Afghan women working for the United Nations or diplomatic missions and whether women in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could continue to work by having access to communications technology.

Main points raised in the meeting

- The situation for women and girls has deteriorated significantly over the past year. The Taliban have issued many more restrictions, of increasing severity, that affect their rights, and while some exemptions have been secured, none of the restrictions have been reversed to date.
- The restrictions have ranged from the continued "suspension" of secondary education for girls since March 2022, despite earlier assurances that schools would open for the new school year, to dress codes and gender segregation in government premises, the requirement to travel with a male chaperone or *mahram*, the recommendation that women avoid leaving the house altogether, disciplinary actions against husbands, fathers and brothers of women deemed not to be in compliance with such instructions, and prohibitions on accessing public parks, gyms, and bathhouses, which are essential for women without bathrooms in their homes. In some localities, such as Kandahar, the Taliban closed women-operated shops and beauty salons. UNAMA has documented various incidents of women being beaten for being outside the house without a *mahram* or not wearing what is deemed as a proper hijab.

- In December 2022, the Taliban suspended university education for women, and a few days later, the Taliban Ministry of Economy issued a letter addressed to the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development banning women employees from working in national and international non-governmental organizations. Since then, the health sector and the primary education sector have been largely exempted from these restrictions. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that there were about 4,200 health facilities and that all but 37 were functioning as before the ban, with women comprising about 35 to 40 per cent of the workforce. According to the WHO survey, 97 per cent of women health workers are still reporting to work, and 9 of the 14 NGOs that suspended operations in December have now fully resumed their operations in the health sector.
- However, in many other sectors, the impact of the restrictions has been immediate and hampering aid operations, and if the ban is not reversed, it will lead to further population displacement into the Islamic Republic of Iran or Pakistan, as assistance will be inaccessible in Afghanistan. A UN-Women survey targeting mainly women-led civil society organizations and women working in national and international humanitarian agencies that was conducted shortly after the ban found that only 6 per cent of respondents were still operating fully and 34 per cent had stopped all activities. The impact of the ban in different sectors is being monitored regularly by the humanitarian country team. The Taliban is reportedly working on guidelines to enable women to continue to work under certain circumstances, but the United Nations will continue to advocate a full reversal of the ban.
- For example, as sent in writing after the meeting, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that nearly half of all mine action clearance and awareness operations in the eastern region have been halted owing to the ban on women humanitarian workers. Beyond the immediate impacts on safety, more than 150 mine action employees will lose their jobs, about 65,000 women and girls will not receive explosive ordnance risk education training as planned, and the ban will limit access to 36,000 women identified for consultation and surveys.
- Some 30 per cent of the direct beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance in the agriculture sector are women, and that assistance requires that women deliver to women or it will not reach them. This is especially critical in the third year of drought in a country where 70 per cent of the population live in rural areas and are living off agriculture.
- On education, the situation varies from province to province and from district to district. Of 34 provinces, approximately 10 had kept schools for girls open before the winter break, but most had to shut down because of the harsh conditions of the winter.
- These restrictions, including the most recent ones affecting aid operations, have been met with widespread condemnation from the international community, including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, regional and Muslim-majority countries and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. A full reversal of the restrictions is repeatedly demanded by the United Nations in its engagements with the Taliban. This was a point of emphasis of the recent visit by a delegation consisting of the Deputy Secretary-General, the Executive Director of UN-Women, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, who visited Kabul, Herat and Kandahar from 17 to 20 January. According to participants, some members of the Taliban are more open to discussing some of the restrictions, such as the bans on girls' education or women working in non-governmental organizations, but their position is unlikely to

influence the key decision makers among the Taliban. Similar messages were relayed during a subsequent visit by members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Delegations engaged with the Taliban Cabinet members, including at the local level, and heard some receptiveness among some interlocutors regarding women's employment with non-governmental organizations and women's and girls' right to education but no assurance of forthcoming changes by decision makers in Kandahar.

- Women working for the United Nations have not yet been directly affected by the new restrictions. There are weekly meetings with Afghan women working for the United Nations on how to keep them safe and enable them to work, from supporting them with transport to the office to providing them with equipment to work from home to installing solar panels to mitigate the impact of electricity cuts. For many women among United Nations national staff, the office is often the only place where they can go and find community. To work from home, communications technology helps, but there are electricity and internet outages and sometimes only electricity for three hours of the day. This technology is often monitored or controlled by the men in the household, and it is hard for women to even get a SIM card for themselves. Furthermore, the United Nations is heavily dependent on working with the NGOs that have been affected by the ban. Some 70 per cent of the humanitarian response is implemented by NGOs.
- Participants recalled that the Emergency Relief Coordinator had recently expressed concern to the Security Council that the imposition by the Houthis in Yemen of strict *mahram* requirements on women humanitarian workers was a sign that the Taliban's actions – and the international community's response to them – would affect women's rights beyond Afghanistan's borders.
- With regards to the engagement of the United Nations with women in Afghanistan, participants noted that consultations with diverse women were currently the only path to keep women's agency and leadership alive and active. UN-Women is constantly consulting with women in Afghanistan, and jointly with UNAMA on a quarterly basis, and a women's advisory board comprised of 24 women from 21 provinces has been set up to advise the humanitarian country team. At the national level, the United Nations has been able to facilitate engagement with the Taliban on certain matters, such as between women entrepreneurs and the Taliban Minister of Commerce and Industry, but there are also some opportunities to facilitate such engagement in some of the provinces within reasonable bounds for staff safety. It is important for the United Nations to step up and sustain these engagements, not only to hear directly from Afghan women how they are affected by these restrictions and how they would like international actors to respond but also to signal to the Taliban the importance of women's voices and perspectives in public decision-making.
- According to additional information sent in writing after the meeting, the findings from a survey conducted by the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies in August 2022 show that women's rights remain the highest priority for women in Afghanistan, ahead of even their most basic security or humanitarian needs, and similar prioritization was found in consultations with UNAMA and UN-Women.
- The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, which has covered Afghanistan since the inception of its mandate in 2010, noted that data on sexual violence in Afghanistan had always been very difficult to obtain and that that was now made much harder by the exclusion of women from the justice and security sectors. Women lawyers are prohibited from obtaining licences and have many restrictions on accessing court,

resulting in higher use of informal justice mechanisms presided over by local religious scholars and community elders. This exclusion, coupled with the abolition of many institutions that used to monitor and document human rights violations – including the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission – makes it all the more difficult to prevent or respond to violence against women and girls. For that reason, when extending the UNAMA mandate, the Security Council should call upon the Taliban to enable full access for human rights monitors, ensure the meaningful participation of women in the justice and security sectors, hold perpetrators accountable and request UNAMA to continue to monitor and report on women’s rights violations and sexual violence.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group:¹

- The Security Council should urgently consider issuing a resolution addressing the most recent decisions affecting the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, along the lines of the press statement agreed upon by the Council on 27 December 2022. The resolution should clearly demand that the Taliban guarantee the rights of Afghan women to work in domestic and international non-governmental organizations and demand guarantees for the full enjoyment of women’s and girls’ right to education.
- In view of the Security Council’s upcoming consideration of the mandate of UNAMA, the Council should retain all of the gender-related language from resolution [2626 \(2022\)](#) and press for its full implementation, including by providing adequate resources. The Council could also update the mandate to address the additional restrictions on the rights of women and girls introduced since the mandate was enacted and to strengthen language on the facilitation by UNAMA of women’s systematic participation in political dialogue, both with men and women in local communities and with the Taliban, whenever safe, as well as on UNAMA continuing to engage with international and regional partners.
- The Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1988 \(2011\)](#) should convene a dedicated session on the role that the committee can play in responding to violations of women’s rights in Afghanistan, including hearing from Afghan women directly, especially those inside the country, broadening the listing criteria to include women’s rights violations, and considering using all the tools at the Committee’s disposal.
- Members of the Security Council should support all diplomatic efforts by the United Nations, regional organizations and international non-governmental organizations to lift all restrictions on women’s rights and ensure that women play an active and central role in those engagements and negotiations.
- Members of the Security Council, in their role as donors, should maintain direct funding to women-led organizations for salary payments and institutional costs while continuing to advocate the full resumption of their activities.

The Co-Chairs thanked all participants and committed to following up on the important issues raised at the meeting.

¹ The recommendations are suggestions made by United Nations representatives participating in the meeting or were contained in the background note prepared by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, ahead of the meeting; they are not recommendations made by the Informal Expert Group as a whole or by members of the Security Council.



Security Council

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Letter dated 5 April 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Group on the situation in South Sudan (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland
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(Signed) Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**
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(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the
United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 5 April 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council: summary of the meeting on the situation in South Sudan, held on 20 February 2023

On 20 February 2023, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in South Sudan. The members received a briefing from the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan, Sara Beysolow Nyanti, accompanied by representatives of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations made by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Security Council members

Security Council members asked about women's meaningful participation in public decision-making, including in the constitutional review process and upcoming elections; reprisals against women peacebuilders, women human rights defenders and women-led organizations; violence against women as voters and candidates in the electoral process; and the capacity of the Mission and the country team to address all those issues effectively. Other questions were focused on conflict-related sexual violence and its worrisome increase over the past year, on the implementation of the action plans adopted by the armed forces and the police to address conflict-related sexual violence, on accountability for perpetrators and on the status of current or pending legislation, such as that relating to the protection of victims and witnesses. In addition, Council members asked about specific ways to increase the percentage of women in security sector institutions and peacekeeping mission patrols and whether a gender perspective was being integrated into assessments and interventions to address climate-related shocks, such as flooding.

Main points raised at the meeting

- Since the last meeting of the Informal Expert Group two years ago, the Security Council has strengthened the language on women and peace and security in its decisions on South Sudan, with regard to both the mandate of the peacekeeping mission and the sanctions committee. The Council has also received briefings on six separate occasions since February 2021 from South Sudanese women from civil society, who have repeatedly expressed concern over unmet quotas for women due to a lack of political will, the slow pace of implementation of the gender-related provisions of the peace agreement, and high levels of conflict-related sexual violence.
- In August 2022, the signatories of the peace agreement agreed on a new road map to extend the transition by 24 months in order to enable the implementation of key outstanding tasks, such as the unification of the Necessary Unified Forces, the holding of elections and the drafting of the new Constitution. Some women's groups expressed regret about the low level of women's participation in the decisions about the road map.

- Following the resolution of the political impasse, the reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly adopted important legislation at the end of 2022. However, other priority bills concerning the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan remain pending, such as the family law bill and draft legislation against gender-based violence, which have not yet been scheduled for debate. Conflict-related sexual violence, for example, is still not a stand-alone war crime in South Sudanese legislation.
- The 35 per cent quota for women included in the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan has still not been met. Generally, women's representation at the expert meetings and consultations held by the reconstituted National Constitutional Amendment Committee is limited. One of the five Vice-Presidents of the country, the Speaker of the reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly and the Deputy Speaker of the Council of States are women. There are also several women ministers, but only 1 of the 10 states and 2 administrative areas is led by a woman. In spite of significant legal, customary and sociocultural barriers, many South Sudanese women are ready to take on decision-making positions. Therefore, the use of temporary special measures and quotas, as proposed in the Revitalized Agreement, provides an opportunity for promoting greater representation of women in the mechanisms and institutions of the Agreement and the upcoming elections.
- Efforts to bring on board groups that have not signed the Revitalized Agreement continue, in particular through the Rome peace process facilitated by the Community of Sant' Egidio, although no information was provided about women's participation or gender issues in relation to the process. Recently, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, granted pardons to 71 prisoners, including 7 women.
- The unification of the armed forces continues but is being hampered by a lack of funding and logistical capability, including for women former combatants and women associated with the armed groups who remain in cantonment sites for a long time, putting up with difficult conditions, such as flooding in some sites.
- UNMISS, UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme are implementing a project to mainstream gender into security sector reform, with the support of the Peacebuilding Fund. The project has included the establishment and operationalization of several women's networks and the creation of women-friendly spaces in security sector institutions, among other deliverables. UNMISS, under the leadership of the Police Commissioner, has collaborated with the South Sudan National Police Service to build the capacity to preventing and responding to cases of gender-based violence across the country, including through training and co-location.
- Other recent interventions led by UN-Women and the United Nations Theme Group on Gender include supporting the Government in the development and adoption of the second phase of the national action plan on women and peace and security; submitting to the Ministry of Justice a comprehensive gender analysis of 27 laws to inform legislative reforms and the constitution-making process and contribute to eliminating gender-based discrimination; enhancing the capacity of special protection units of the police to monitor and respond to gender-based violence; and providing access to economic opportunities for more than 1,100 women to start up small business enterprises through more than

120 village savings and loan associations and the scaling up of five women's economic empowerment centres.

- In February 2022, the United Nations and the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity organized a three-day high-level conference on women's leadership. Several participants demanded gender parity, although the 35 per cent quota has not been met. Approximately 500 women, as well as the President, Vice-Presidents, several ministers, members of the parliament, governors and former Presidents from other African countries, participated in the conference. Prior to the event, Pope Francis, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland visited South Sudan as part of their ecumenical missions to Africa and underscored the need for women to be involved in political and decision-making processes.
- The security situation has deteriorated in several locations, especially in Warrap, Central and Eastern Equatoria, Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei. The clashes have led to mass displacement and a significant number of abductions and incidents of conflict-related sexual violence.
- In October 2022, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict visited South Sudan to call for expedited implementation of the action plans of the armed forces and the police on addressing conflict-related sexual violence, comprehensive training and vetting of the unified forces, and the removal from power of individuals credibly suspected of patterns of conflict-related sexual violence. Progress on the action plans is an indicator of the consolidation of peace and a benchmark for sanctions relief and delisting from the annex to the annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence. The United Nations works closely with the Joint Implementation Committee of the Joint Action Plan for the Armed Forces on addressing conflict-related sexual violence in South Sudan, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs leads a monthly meeting during which the implementation of the Joint Action Plan is reviewed. The implementation of the action plan for the police has advanced at a slower pace.
- The United Nations verified 299 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence in 2022, compared with 194 in 2021. Lack of services, a lack of protection of victims and witnesses, and intimidation of, and reprisals against women's organizations and human rights defenders inhibit the reporting of human rights violations. The majority of cases are attributed to non-State armed groups, including civil defence forces and community-based militias, but 38 per cent are still attributed to the armed forces and 5 per cent to the police. Women and girls are especially at risk when conducting essential livelihood activities, travelling to and from school and fleeing hostilities.
- The United Nations is also assisting women released from abduction by the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition in Western Equatoria, noting the presence of 93 children born of conflict-related sexual violence among that group, who are at risk of being stigmatized and ostracized.
- Impunity for serious crimes, including sexual violence, remains pervasive. To assist women and girls in accessing justice and seeking accountability, UNMISS supported civilian and military justice actors in deploying mobile civilian and military courts across South Sudan. UNMISS supported the Military Justice Directorate of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces for deploying 11 general court martials in promoting accountability for serious crimes, including sexual violence and conflict-related sexual violence. UNMISS also provided technical assistance and capacity-building support to the Directorate for investigating and prosecuting sexual violence and ensuring a victim-centred

approach throughout the process. In addition, UNMISS supported deployments of a joint special mobile court to address serious crimes, including sexual violence, related to cattle migration in the border areas of Warrap and Western Bahr el-Ghazal States. Community members and local officials have stated that the mobile court has contributed to peace and stability, increased the numbers of returnees and built trust in the formal justice system.

- The United Nations continues to document cases of reprisals against and intimidation of women human rights defenders and is working to expand networks of women human rights defenders to all states, as well as to finalize guidance on how to support individuals seeking protection on UNMISS premises.
- Some 9.4 million people, more than three quarters of the population of South Sudan, are expected to need humanitarian assistance in 2023, and the humanitarian response plan has received only 1 per cent of its funding requirements so far this year. Women and girls are disproportionately affected.
- Climate-related shocks, including extensive flooding, are behind much of the increase in humanitarian needs, and the United Nations will ensure that a gender perspective is central to its work on climate adaptation and mitigation.
- Giving attention and resources to gender equality issues will be crucial to respond to increasing demands for support. These include the upcoming elections and constitutional review process, the need to deliver on both policy reform at the national level and change at the community level, and the significant investment by the World Bank and the African Development Bank to promote women's economic empowerment, peacebuilding, and services for survivors of gender-based violence.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.¹

In the upcoming negotiations on the renewal of the UNMISS mandate, the Security Council should retain the references in its resolution [2625 \(2022\)](#) to women and peace and security, including those references relating to accountability and transitional justice, and consider the following additions:

- The language in paragraph 14 of the resolution could be updated to include an expression of regret at the low level of women's participation in the transition road map and demand women's meaningful participation in its implementation, as well as in the drafting of the Constitution, the unification of the armed forces, the establishment and operationalization of transitional justice mechanisms and the preparations for the elections, with due consideration for displaced and refugee women.
- In the same paragraph, the Security Council called upon parties to "recognize the need to protect women-led organizations and women peacebuilders from threats and reprisals and provide a safe environment to enable them to carry out their work safely and freely". This could be expanded to include a request for the Mission to enhance its reporting to the Council on those issues.

¹ The recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants at the meeting, or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

- In paragraphs on humanitarian aid and on security conditions conducive to its delivery, a reference could be included on the need for adequate consultation and involvement of women in humanitarian delivery and planning and for due consideration of their leadership in camp management.
- Given the alarming surge in conflict-related sexual violence in 2022, the Security Council should call upon the Government to prioritize and focus on the full and expedited implementation of the 2014 joint communiqué of South Sudan and the United Nations on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, the Joint Action Plan for the Armed Forces on addressing conflict-related sexual violence in South Sudan and the action plan for the police on the same subject. The Council should urge the Government to update the country's legal framework, including by formulating, adopting and implementing a stand-alone law on victim and witness protection, adopting legislation on conflict-related sexual violence as an international crime in line with international standards, and fast-tracking the adoption of a law against gender-based violence. In addition, the Council should call upon the Government to facilitate unhindered access to multisectoral services for survivors and prioritize justice and reparations.
- The language in paragraph 16 could be strengthened by including a call upon the Government to implement the Comprehensive Action Plan to End and Prevent All Grave Violations against Children, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, signed in 2020 with the United Nations, and to strengthen the overall legal framework to safeguard children's rights in South Sudan.
- The Security Council could request enhanced gender analysis in the reports of the Secretary-General, with special attention to the reasons for the persistent underrepresentation of women in decision-making and the continued high levels of sexual violence. The Council could encourage the reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission to publish the percentage of women's representation in each of the transitional institutions of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan in its quarterly reports.
- The Security Council could commend the investment of the World Bank in women's economic empowerment and encourage other international partners to scale up their support to survivors of gender-based violence.
- The Security Council could also commend efforts to adopt a second national action plan on women and peace and security and encourage the allocation of resources for its adequate implementation.

The Co-Chairs expressed thanks to all participants and committed to following up on the important issues raised at the meeting.



Security Council

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Letter dated 16 May 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Mali (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland
to the United Nations

(Signed) Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**
Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates
to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom
to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 16 May 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Mali, held on 28 March 2023

On 28 March 2023, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council convened a meeting on the situation in Mali. The members received a briefing by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Daniela Krosiak, who was accompanied by representatives from the MINUSMA and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations provided by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Security Council members asked for the implications that the different scenarios laid out in the recent strategic review of MINUSMA (S/2023/36) would have on women and girls, and how to avoid the worst outcome for them; suggestions to strengthen the language on women and peace and security in the next resolution on Mali, and especially on women's participation in specific processes; and stronger cooperation between the Mission and the panel of experts monitoring the sanctions regime to facilitate the listing of alleged perpetrators. Council members raised the matter of the need to ensure the protection of women and girls beyond the conflict-affected areas in the north and the centre, as well as the need for more data on the situation of women and girls in the areas controlled by terrorist groups. They asked for the United Nations plans to address the fact that the new draft constitution has no explicit references to gender parity, gender-based violence or the promotion of women's rights, efforts to prevent both online and offline violence against women candidates ahead of elections or the participation of women and girls in the prevention and response to climate-related shocks, and how the Mission was following up on reprisals against women peacebuilders, including Aminata Dicko, who had given a briefing to the Security Council in January 2023. Other questions revolved around the impact on women and girls of the impasse in the peace process, the extent of hate speech aimed at women in public life and the results of the investigation into alleged grave violations of human rights in Moura, central Mali, in March 2022. One Council member requested that all United Nations reports mention the Wagner Group by name rather than referring broadly to "foreign security personnel".

Main points raised in the meeting

- Since the previous meeting of the Informal Expert Group, in April 2021, the Security Council has adopted four resolutions, all including provisions on women and peace and security, and has received briefings by six Malian women from civil society. The most recent of these, Ms. Dicko, was subjected to threats and harassment after her briefing, and the Security Council met in February 2023 to discuss these worrisome developments.

- As laid out by the transitional authorities, several key electoral deadlines in 2023 will pave the way to a return to constitutional order, culminating in the holding of presidential elections scheduled for February 2024. Despite some delays, including the recent postponement of the constitutional referendum, the transitional authorities have reiterated that they remain committed to maintaining this electoral calendar.
- The transitional authorities have made some inroads into placing gender parity and inclusivity on the political agenda of the transition. Several decision-making bodies are now close to reaching the legislative gender quota of 30 per cent, as required by law since December 2015. For example, women make up 28.6 per cent of the members of the transitional assembly (compared with 9.5 per cent in 2013). Women also make up 20.7 per cent of ministers and ministers delegate. Additionally, four women were appointed by decree to the 15-member Independent Electoral Management Authority, making up more than a quarter of its members. Women make up 38 per cent of the members of the Peace Agreement Monitoring Committee and its four subcommittees. The transitional Government has also endorsed and kick-started the socioeconomic integration of 900 women from the signatory movements, a process led by the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission and financed by the World Bank.
- Despite these advances, women remain heavily underrepresented, especially in regional and local government. For example, only 4.6 per cent of the prefects appointed in July 2022 and in February 2023 are women. There is only one woman currently serving as governor, the governor of Sikasso, only the fourth woman governor appointed since the independence of Mali. Women make up only 11 per cent of all ambassadors.
- On 27 January, the president appointed a commission to finalize the draft constitution. Only 20 per cent of its members were women, and women were not appointed to some of the key positions on this commission. The United Nations has supported civil society in analysing the draft text and informing communities about it, while a date for the referendum has not yet been agreed after its recent postponement.
- Women's participation in the economy also remains limited, with women lacking access to and control and ownership of land and financial assets.
- As for the security sector, women also remain largely absent. For example, women make up only 0.6 per cent of members of the Operational Coordination Mechanism set up under the Peace Agreement and consisting of joint units from the national army and the signatory movements.
- Efforts are being undertaken by the transitional authorities to support women's entry into public life, their representation within State institutions and participation in the economic sector. In this respect, the transitional authorities continue to solicit the support of the United Nations and other key international partners, including for capacity-building initiatives led by the Government.
- Recently, for example, MINUSMA, together with UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), supported the organization of a high-level inclusive seminar, co-led by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, in charge of the electoral process, and the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family. This exercise culminated in the validation of the content of a road map for gender integration in the electoral process and upcoming political and administrative reforms. MINUSMA is also fostering the efforts of women from political parties

and civil society by supporting initiatives to reinforce their leadership skills and capacities and analyse and disseminate the draft constitution.

- The United Nations is also supporting the building of dormitories for women officers in the police and gendarmerie deployed in Gao, Mopti and Timbuktu to facilitate increased representation of women in the security sector.
- The United Nations and bilateral partners are providing technical and financial support for the implementation of the third national action plan on women and peace and security (2019–2023). As part of localization efforts, the plan has been adopted in 9 regions out of 20 (19 regions plus Bamako district), and an assessment by UN-Women indicates that those regions register greater acceptance of women as peace and security actors in their communities, including their mediation efforts at the local level and community-based conflict prevention (women’s peace huts, peace circles, peace observatories, inter alia). The main challenge for greater implementation remains financial resources.
- Compared with 2021, 2022 saw a 49 per cent increase in reported cases of gender-based violence. Of these, 55 per cent were cases of sexual violence. In addition to conflict-related sexual violence, targeted violence against women and harmful social practices, abductions of girls by armed groups continue to be reported, including the kidnapping of 21 girls in Ségou as recently as January 2023. The United Nations requested greater support to scale up initiatives that are already working – such as the establishment of 17 one-stop-centres for survivors of gender-based violence, the deployment of mobile units to support internally displaced persons and host communities, and the interventions funded by the Spotlight Initiative – and strengthen data collection efforts at the local level, given the lack of access to conflict-affected areas.
- Access to multisectoral services remains severely limited, especially in remote areas as one-stop centres are mainly located in regional capitals, compelling survivors living outside of these urban centres to traverse vast distances. In 2022, 92 per cent of survivors were unable to access safe shelters, while 42 per cent were unable to obtain medical support. Security incidents, including vandalism, affected 65 per cent of service provision facilities in Gao and Ménaka.
- Despite widespread insecurity, which hampered access, monitoring and reporting, the United Nations verified 98 cases of conflict-related sexual violence affecting 85 women and 13 girls. The perpetrators were members of armed groups, including the *Coordination des mouvements de l’Azawad* (CMA), the *Mouvement pour le salut de l’Azawad Dawsahak* (MSA-D), *Groupe d’autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et alliés* (GATIA) and the *Coordination des mouvements et front patriotique de résistance* (CMFPR), as well as members of militia and self-defence groups, such as *Dan Na Ambassagou* and *Ganda-Izo*. Of concern is the increased use of sexual violence by militias and self-defence groups which often goes unreported because of the proximity of these groups to local communities and the attendant fear of reprisals. In some cases, the perpetrators were armed elements who could not be identified. Members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces and foreign security personnel were also implicated in cases of sexual violence against civilians.
- The United Nations continued to support the implementation of the 2019 joint communiqué to address conflict-related sexual violence, as well as unilateral commitments by non-State actors to tackle sexual violence, in particular CMA. The sustained engagement between MINUSMA and the High Islamic Council of Mali culminated in the signing of a fatwa in January 2023 which urged the prohibition of conflict-related sexual violence, underscored the need to hold perpetrators accountable and encouraged support from communities to survivors

and children born of rape. The United Nations continues to support national judicial authorities to advance in the proceedings of the four emblematic cases of conflict-related sexual violence which involve 145 victims and have been pending before the courts for more than a decade.

- The transitional Government adopted a decree in November 2022 establishing the compensation modalities for damages resulting from serious human rights violations, including financial support to cover medical treatment costs, as well as rehabilitation for both survivors and their children, including children born of conflict-related rape.
- In the discussion, the group was also informed that another Malian woman from civil society had recently been arrested on account of public statements that she had made on social media.
- In January 2023, the Secretary-General presented the strategic review report, containing three main options and several suboptions for the reconfiguration of the MINUSMA mandate and presence. In the light of the challenging situation regarding women and their rights, the United Nations insisted that it was important that the prioritization of women and peace and security remains at the core of any reconfiguration of the mandate of MINUSMA, that a reduced MINUSMA presence would have a negative impact on the situation for women, their protection and ability to participate fully in the peace process and would risk an expansion of extremist armed groups and a deteriorating security situation, with increased violations of women's rights, including sexual and gender-based violence, as a result.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.¹

In the negotiations on the mandate renewal for MINUSMA, the Security Council should continue to prioritize women and peace and security and retain the references to women, peace and security in resolution [2640 \(2022\)](#), including in any reconfiguration of the mandate, and consider the following additions:

(a) Urge Malian transitional authorities to strictly apply Law No. 2015-052 of 18 December 2015, with a 30 per cent quota for women in elected and appointed positions, regretting that women are still significantly underrepresented in national, local and regional government, and urging their meaningful participation in the transition and restoration of civilian rule, as well as any engagement with signatory or non-signatory armed groups, in line with the recommendations of the 2020 national dialogue;

(b) Urge and support the transitional authorities of Mali to create a conducive environment for women's rights and their protection and promotion, that prevents and addresses violence, including gender-based violence, against women peacebuilders, human right defenders and women's organizations engaged in the political transition, electoral process and the peace process, including through legal frameworks, and request the Mission to monitor and report on these matters;

¹ These recommendations are suggestions by United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, including by the Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict. They are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

(c) Call upon the transitional authorities of Mali to facilitate the participation of internally displaced persons and returnees, including women, in the upcoming elections and the constitutional referendum;

(d) Urge the transitional authorities to redouble their efforts to achieve the effective implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security;

(e) Urge the transitional authorities to ensure the participation of women, including from civil society and in forced displacement within the country, in decision-making processes related to national security and counter-terrorism policies and military expenditures;

(f) Urge the transitional authorities to adopt and implement a law on gender-based violence, establish mechanism to facilitate the protection of victims of gender-based violence, and reinforce victims' access to justice, and request support from the United Nations and international partners to this end;

(g) Urge the transitional authorities to prioritize the cases of conflict-related sexual violence pending before the courts for a decade now, to investigate gross violations or abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including by national armed forces, armed and militia groups and foreign security personnel, and to ensure that the law on reparations is effectively implemented and addresses the needs of survivors, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and those who have testified before the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission;

(h) Ensure the recruitment of an adequate number of Gender Advisers and Women's Protection Advisers to reach conflict-affected areas of Mali and operate in proximity to communities at risk;

(i) Call upon the transitional authorities to accelerate the implementation of the joint communiqué to address conflict-related sexual violence and the three-year joint Action Plan adopted by the Government of Mali and MINUSMA to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence;

(j) Request the United Nations and international partners to contribute to preventing and responding to harmful practices affecting women and girls and develop innovative solutions to address these in areas where the presence of the State is limited;

(k) Request the United Nations and international partners to conduct gender-sensitive risk-assessments on the adverse effects of climate change and to ensure women's meaningful participation and leadership in efforts to address the impact of climate-related shocks on peace and security in Mali, including through conflict-sensitive natural resource management;

(l) Request the United Nations and international partners to support programmes aimed at enhancing women's participation, protection and empowerment that will contribute to stabilization in the centre and the north of the country.

In addition, members of the Security Council could request more detailed information from the United Nations on the women's rights situation in areas controlled by armed groups in central and northern Mali, and the potential impact of each of the options laid out in the strategic review for MINUSMA (S/2023/36 of 16 January 2023), as well as the withdrawal of several troop contributing countries.

The Co-Chairs thanked all participants and committed to follow up on the important issues raised at the meeting.

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
7 August 2023

Original: English

Letter dated 3 August 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Syria (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**
Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates
to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom
to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 3 August 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council: summary of the meeting on the situation in Syria, held on 2 May 2023

On 2 May 2023, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Syria. The members received a briefing from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Geir Pedersen, and the Deputy Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in New York, Heli Uusikyla. Members exchanged questions and answers with the briefers, after which the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) presented key recommendations developed in coordination with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, which also shared additional observations at the end of the meeting.

Questions from Security Council members

Security Council members asked several questions about the humanitarian situation in the wake of the devastating earthquakes of February 2023. They asked about gaps in humanitarian aid for women and girls, such as obstetric or antenatal care for pregnant women in displacement camps, or access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for women impacted by the earthquake, as well as gender-based violence and mental health and psychosocial support in a context of increased prevalence of violence against women and girls and rising suicide rates. Council members wanted to know the specific impact of the lack of resources in humanitarian aid and services targeting women and girls, and whether the increased access after the earthquake had resulted in improvements in the gender-responsiveness of aid delivery, as well as any preliminary findings on the socioeconomic impact of the earthquake on women and girls. Several Council members asked for opportunities to recognize the agency of women peacebuilders and support women-led organizations and women human rights defenders, as well as ways to address protection concerns, emphasizing the importance of combating impunity, especially for sexual and gender-based violence. They also enquired whether the United Nations had gender-specific findings from the more than 70 missions conducted into north-west Syria since mid-February. Some questions focused on other issues affecting women and girls, such as the rate of girls dropping out of school, any available data on trafficking of women and girls, or humanitarian access to Al-Hol and other camps populated primarily by women and children. There were also questions about the barriers to women's participation in humanitarian planning and conflict resolution, and whether the women advising the Special Envoy or the Humanitarian Liaison Group are able to establish wide contacts with women throughout Syria, including at the grass-roots level.

Main points raised at the meeting

- Since the last time the Informal Expert Group met to discuss Syria, in February 2020, the Security Council has adopted four resolutions, all of them extensions of the authorization for the Syria cross-border aid mechanisms, and none of them mentioned women or gender-related issues. Before 2020, all previous resolutions on cross-border aid had recognized the high number of displaced

women, recalled the legal obligations of all parties under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including ceasing the widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence, and had called for the release of all arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children. Since February 2020, 13 women from civil society have briefed the Council on Syria, two of them twice in that period.

- The Special Envoy and his deputy, Najat Rochdi, rely very heavily on the advice of Syrian women in their mediation efforts to reach a comprehensive political solution in Syria in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which specifically calls for effective women's participation in the political process. The outreach of the Office of the Special Envoy to Syrian women includes members of formal parties in the political process, participants in the Constitutional Committee, and cooperation with consultative bodies such as the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and the Civil Society Support Room. The advice of Syrian women has been valuable with regard not only to gender equality issues but also to issues related to sovereignty, equality and equal citizenship, pluralism and diversity, civic space, protection, local administration and decentralization, transparency and accountability, regional re-engagement with Syria, and protection concerns for the safe and voluntary return of refugees. In recent months, the Office of the Special Envoy has conducted outreach missions to Syria, Lebanon, Türkiye and northern Iraq, where they have prioritized consultations with women.
- In the Constitutional Committee, which has regrettably not met for nearly a year for reasons unrelated to Syria, women make up 29 per cent of its members and have frequently raised issues related to women's political participation, quotas for women, gender-based violence, women's rights and non-discrimination, as well as provided a gender-sensitive perspective related to other political debates that have taken place during the eight sessions convened to date.
- Throughout these engagements, Syrian women have insisted that the future of Syria must take into account their own needs and priorities. Their visions build upon the roles that many have been thrust into as a result of sustained conflict and social upheaval. Women have headed households and assumed new responsibilities, both public and private, in their families and communities. They have broadened their professional lives and engaged in public debate, choosing to be visible even when it may have been safer to remain unseen.
- The dire humanitarian situation in Syria has significantly deteriorated since the last meeting of the Informal Expert Group on Syria, in 2020, when around 11 million people needed humanitarian assistance. Today, nearly 70 per cent of Syria's population, or 15.3 million people, are profoundly impacted by 12 years of crisis, economic downturns, and climate shocks and require humanitarian assistance. The earthquakes that struck Türkiye and Syria on 6 February have further worsened this crisis, causing damage to more than 390,000 housing units, 2,149 schools, and 241 health facilities in both countries.
- Syrian women face a range of legal and administrative challenges to exercising their rights, including accessing education, medical care and civil documentation, or participating in public and social life, especially those in a single-headed household. The earthquakes have made these challenges more pronounced as thousands of families lost or left behind housing, land and property documents as well as civil documents, an issue that was already a concern to millions of Syrians who were displaced by 12 years of conflict. The earthquake trauma combined with the loss of family members, homes and income sources have had a huge toll on affected people, especially women: adolescent girls and elderly women have become caregivers for younger siblings

and grandchildren; women in collective shelters and reception centres are facing safety and security concerns; women with disabilities are increasingly in need of extended family support; and women-headed households are now even more vulnerable to long-term poverty. In north-west Syria, multisectoral needs assessment data show that 56 per cent of pregnant and breastfeeding women and 36 per cent of children under 5 are anaemic. The malnutrition rates of pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as adolescent girls, have significantly increased as food prices doubled in the past 12 months alone. UN-Women research shows that a high percentage of income generated by women inside the home through informal economic activities has become untenable owing to the destruction of homes and buildings, with a devastating economic impact on their livelihoods. Even before the earthquakes, women and girls were used as economic coping mechanisms through forced and early marriage, or subjugated by unregulated, informal labour markets offering no protection.

- Generous donor contributions through the Central Emergency Response Fund, the Syria earthquake flash appeal, the Syria Humanitarian Fund and the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund have allowed the United Nations and non-governmental organization partners to reach thousands of women and girls affected by the earthquake in Syria with food aid, shelters, dignity and maternity kits, hygiene kits, emergency nutrition packages and cash assistance. Humanitarian actors have also established and run safe spaces for women and girls and provided gender-based violence and reproductive health-care services, legal counselling, mental health services, and protection training to staff running collective shelters. The expanded cross-border access following a decision by the Syrian Government after the earthquake has allowed for more crucial United Nations support to reach women and girls in north-west Syria. Over 1,800 trucks have crossed through three border crossings, and United Nations agencies have conducted 76 inter-agency missions.
- At the same time, the Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria is less than 8 per cent funded, severely limiting the ability of the United Nations and partners to meet the needs of women and girls across Syria. Limited and insufficient funding for gender-based violence programming has affected the functioning of referral pathways and safe spaces across the country as well as caused gaps in the availability of trained health workers, post-rape treatment kits, and sexual and reproductive health care in displacement camps.
- The United Nations aims to increase the representation of women on assessment teams to reach the 30 per cent minimum benchmark established by the Whole of Syria Strategic Steering Group, even as women aid workers were forced to move to new communities or to prioritize family and childbearing responsibilities in the aftermath of the earthquake.
- Since 2021, the Syrian women's advisory group in Gaziantep provides a platform for Syrian women to engage in high-level humanitarian decision-making and ensures that Syrian women can directly inform senior leadership and are part of strategic planning in the United Nations-led humanitarian response. However, this is still a nascent mechanism that needs support and resources for their recommendations to be applied widely. Similarly, there is still room for improvement in the collection and use of sex- and age-disaggregated data and in strengthening the engagement of women-led civil society organizations providing humanitarian assistance on the ground, including in their ability to be registered in the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund.

- Syrian women and girls also report that the violence against them has become normalized because of years of conflict. This includes rape in detention, physical and sexual abuse in shelters, harassment at checkpoints, arbitrary arrests, kidnapping, psychological and emotional violence, sexual violence and exploitation, economic abuse, including deprivation of inheritance rights in cases of divorce and for widows, as well as forced and child marriage. Displaced women and children, who are disconnected often multiple times from the security of family and community, are especially at risk. The situation is particularly alarming in camps that predominantly host women and children where various forms of gender-based violence and murder are prevalent, such as Al-Hol camp in north-east Syria. In north-west Syria, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic documented a systematic practice of detention to stifle political dissent by the Security Council-listed terrorist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, with former detainees reporting torture and sexual violence.
- Conflict-related sexual violence is still chronically underreported in Syria owing to a lack of multisectoral response services in certain areas of the country, stigma, fear of reprisals, and pervasive impunity. It is also included in the annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence. To date, with the exception of a conviction in Germany of a former official of the Syrian General Security Directorate through universal jurisdiction, no other convictions for sexual violence offences committed during the decade-long Syrian conflict have been delivered. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General reminded the Group of the importance of ensuring access for the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and strengthening of information and analysis of patterns and trends of sexual violence as a basis for preventive action and programming through the United Nations monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence, as well as the use of sanctions regimes within the purview of counter-terrorism efforts to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence committed by parties to the conflict.
- The issue of detainees, abductees, disappeared and missing persons remains one of the top priorities for Syrian women. The Office of the Special Envoy continues to advocate for large-scale releases of detainees, granting access to international specialized organizations to places of detention, communication between detainees and families, and the creation of a stand-alone entity for missing persons in Syria, following the Secretary-General's recommendation to Member States.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were presented by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, developed in coordination with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.¹

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in this meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, including by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. They are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council members.

In any upcoming resolutions or presidential statements, the Security Council should consider:

- Welcoming all efforts to facilitate and expand humanitarian access, including the renewal of the United Nations cross-border authorization to deliver humanitarian aid, to ensure continuity in access to life-saving aid and basic services and keep pace with the unprecedented scale of needs.
- Urging the international community to fully fund the Humanitarian Response Plan, with special attention to: (a) addressing all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls; (b) stronger investments on sexual and reproductive health care, mental health and psychosocial support; (c) enhancing resilience and early recovery programming and access to basic services; (d) mainstreaming gender equality throughout the humanitarian response; and (e) ensuring women's equal and meaningful participation and leadership in decision-making at all levels of the humanitarian response and throughout the humanitarian programme cycle.
- Urging greater investment in local women's organizations to support local grass-roots peacebuilding efforts and the delivery of humanitarian aid. In line with the Secretary-General's five women and peace and security goals for the decade, this could include recommending that donors and international partners multiply by five the humanitarian funding allocated to women-led organizations.
- Demanding all parties to develop policy measures aimed at eliminating discrimination against women and girls in all spheres of life and to achieve substantive gender equality.
- Urging the full, equal and meaningful participation of diverse Syrian women, using the 30 per cent threshold as a minimum, in any peace negotiations, broader political dialogues, discussions on confidence-building measures and national consultations about the future of Syria, and adopt measures to ensure that these targets are reached.
- Stressing the need to invest much more in women's participation in track 2 and track 3 diplomatic efforts and supporting local women peacebuilders and community mediators, inter alia by expanding multi-stakeholder involvement including through dialogues.
- Demanding the parties to refrain from imposing constraints on women's political advocacy or the activities of women's organizations.
- Demanding all parties to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons and facilitate access and investigations by international mechanisms, and remove barriers to and facilitate access to civil documentation, with special attention to women whose spouses are missing or disappeared or have been killed, and supporting the creation of a victim-centred mechanism for missing persons, as outlined in the recommendations of the Secretary-General, emphasizing the central role of families and particularly the women relatives of the disappeared.
- Demanding all parties to end all forms of sexual violence, including in detention settings, to hold perpetrators accountable and to facilitate humanitarian access throughout the country in order to ensure the provision of multisectoral services.
- Recommending the creation of survivor-centred justice mechanisms for all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including reparations and guarantees of non-repetition, and requesting that victims of sexual violence perpetrated by terrorist groups be recognized as victims of terrorism who are entitled to reparations and redress.

- Call on Member States to rapidly and safely allow for the voluntary repatriation of their nationals from camps and places of detention in north-east Syria, with particular urgency for children and their families, in line with international law and standards; and further develop tailored gender- and age-sensitive policies for risk assessment, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration, in accordance with international law.

The Co-Chairs thanked the participants and encouraged all Security Council members to follow up on the important issues raised in the discussion.

**Security Council**

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24 August 2023

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Letter dated 23 August 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Haiti (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**
Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates
to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom
to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 23 August 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council: summary of the meeting on the situation in Haiti, held on 8 June 2023

On 8 June 2023, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Haiti. The members received a briefing from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti and Head of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), María Isabel Salvador, accompanied by colleagues from the mission and the United Nations country team, as well as the Victims' Rights Advocate, Jane Connors. Council members exchanged questions and answers with the briefers. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict presented recommendations and shared additional observations at the end of the meeting.

Questions from Council members

Security Council members asked several questions about the linkages between arms proliferation and the increase in sexual and gender-based violence in Haiti, and particularly by gangs in Port-au-Prince, and additional guidance on how the Council can help to address gender equality issues, including through specific provisions in the mandate of BINUH. There were questions about the capacity needed in the mission for gender equality and women's protection and concerns about delays in filling existing vacancies in these areas. Council members also inquired about the development of a national action plan on women and peace and security, the measures taken by the United Nations to address sexual exploitation and abuse, and whether the United Nations had articulated the parameters that would be required in a non-United Nations international force to ensure that it would protect women and girls effectively.

Main points raised at the meeting

- The rise in gang violence is impeding progress on women and peace and security. Gang violence is expanding at an alarming rate in areas previously considered relatively safe in Port-au-Prince and outside the capital, particularly the Artibonite department, north of the capital. According to data collected by the Haitian National Police and by BINUH, violent criminal incidents in the first quarter of 2023 were almost triple the number registered in the same period in 2022.
- Almost all the documented cases of gender-based violence concern women and girls, and half of them concern girls. Women and girls living in areas under the influence of gangs are at constant risk of rape, including collective rape, and other acts of sexual violence, as documented in detail in a joint report by BINUH and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published in October 2022. In some instances, the victims were raped in front of their children, after having witnessed the execution of their husbands, to instil fear or punish civilians in areas controlled by other gangs. Women and girls also become victims of gang violence while moving across neighbourhoods on foot or in public transport to carry out their daily activities or are forced to become sexual partners of gang members in exchange for food, water or protection for

themselves or their families. Kidnapped women and girls are often victims of sexual violence in captivity. In some cases, the kidnappers use recorded videos of the rapes to extort ransom payments from the victims' relatives.

- Multisectoral assistance to survivors of sexual violence remains limited, as the very few national partners lack resources and poor coordination and difficult access to affected areas further hamper the effectiveness of service delivery. However, the humanitarian appeal's component on gender-based violence prevention and response remains one of the most chronically underfunded. Impunity remains the norm for most cases of sexual violence, fuelled by insecurity, corruption and lack of means. For example, the specialized police units lack the capacity or training to successfully tackle sexual crimes.
- For the first time, the annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence featured a dedicated section on Haiti and has listed a party in its annex: the G9 Family and Allies gang, led by Jimmy Chérizier, also listed by the sanctions committee. It is important that the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence in Haiti are strengthened to be able to provide a more detailed picture to both the Security Council and the sanctions committee.
- Forced displacement of thousands of people because of the gangs' turf wars is depriving women and girls of the family and community safety nets and exposing them to more abuse and sexual violence. Women and girls represent 58 per cent of internally displaced persons and are exposed to greater risk for their life and health. Fifty-two per cent of shelters have no toilet facilities.
- Despite a provision in the Constitution of Haiti requiring a minimum 30 per cent quota of women at "all levels of national life", representation in political institutions remains one of the lowest in the world. For example, in the most recent legislature (2016–2020), there were only 4 women among the 149 members of the parliament. The situation is substantially better at the local level.
- The Government led by Ariel Henry includes 5 women among its 16 ministers and, for the first time, a woman was appointed Minister of Justice and Public Security, albeit on an interim basis. One of Haiti's most recognized constitutional experts, a female law professor (and presidential candidate in 2010), Mirlande Manigat, assumed the chairmanship of the High Transitional Council, a three-member body established to help strengthen national consensus and steer Haiti through the transition towards the restoration of democratic institutions following elections. Several women's organizations and women leaders actively participated in the political forum on security, reforms and governance organized by the High Transitional Council on 23 and 24 May. However, in closed-door negotiations and consultations, women's representation remains weak.
- While women magistrates and lawyers often remain confined to secondary roles, positive developments were seen in the Haitian judicial system with more women appointed at the highest level. The Court of Appeal of Port-au-Prince is currently presided by a woman, and various public prosecutor's offices have more women substitutes and clerks. In addition, on 26 February, three women judges were appointed to fill the eight vacant positions of the Court of Cassation.
- Women account for only 11.7 per cent of members of the Haitian National Police, and among senior ranks the percentage drops below 5 per cent.
- With BINUH support, the Interministerial Task Force on Disarmament, Disengagement, Reintegration and Community Violence Reduction extended its cooperation to community-based civil society, including youth and women's

organizations, for the implementation of the national strategy, including its specific pillar on protection and sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, a dedicated working group was established to enhance the participation of women and women's organizations under the joint leadership of the Ministry for Women Rights and the Ombudsman.

- Other United Nations interventions mentioned include Peacebuilding Fund support for women's participation in community dialogue platforms in neighbourhoods affected by gang violence, and Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund support for projects led by local women's organizations.
- The mission has a limited role in arms control, although the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime leads the United Nations work in this area in Haiti and women participate in United Nations-supported training on weapons and ammunition management. However, the presence of high-calibre weapons and ammunition in Haiti is not an issue that can be resolved by the United Nations, or even fully by the national authorities, but at the point of departure of the weapons trafficked into Haiti. The United Nations noted that this is something that they expect the panel of experts and the Chair of the sanctions committee, visiting later in June, to look deeper into, as one of their points of emphasis will be the role of economic elites supporting the trafficking of arms and their connection with the gangs.
- The United Nations is filling the vacancies for a women's protection adviser and a P-4-level gender adviser soon, but will be seeking support for additional capacity for these functions.
- If deployed, a non-United Nations international force should receive extensive predeployment training on both sexual exploitation and abuse and conflict-related sexual violence. There is a growing consensus among national stakeholders and United Nations colleagues in Haiti that such an international force should not be a military force, but a specialized police force, and that democratic elections should only be pursued once the situation has stabilized.
- The United Nations, under the leadership of UN-Women, is working on the adoption of a national action plan on women and peace and security, but this is currently not a priority for national authorities and is further hampered by the absence of elected institutions. At the moment, UN-Women is focusing on consultations with women's groups and local stakeholders in different departments, to ensure that support for such a plan is broad and not restricted to discussions in the capital.
- Progress is being made to expedite the resolution of pending paternity and child support claims relating to United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) personnel, including through a new framework of cooperation and the approval of a new project supported by the trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, which will provide assistance to 40 mothers and caregivers and 48 children. This support will be in addition to the dozens of victims already coordinated by the Senior Victims' Rights Officer in Haiti, including school fees for children fathered by MINUSTAH personnel years ago and left behind. However, progress is slow due to legal hurdles, uneven commitment of States and the fathers, and insufficient support for the victims, the children and their caretakers in Haiti, and addressing paternity cases one by one, Member State by Member State, will not result in the best possible outcome for the victims and children or the Organization.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were presented by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.¹

In the negotiations on the mandate renewal for BINUH, the Security Council should retain all existing references to women and peace and security in the preamble and operative paragraphs of its resolutions on Haiti since 2019, and consider adding the following:

- Demand the full participation of women, including young women, in all political dialogues and transitional arrangements, and request that the United Nations report periodically on their level of representation in key decision-making and conflict resolution processes, including any initiatives to reform the Constitution or conduct elections, and all efforts to fight corruption, to curb the illicit flow of weapons into Haiti and to reduce violence in the community.
- Request the United Nations to ensure that the panel of experts of the sanctions committee can consult systematically with women's organizations and have regular access to gender expertise and integrates a gender perspective in all aspects of its reporting.
- Ensure that gender equality issues and attention to sexual and gender-based violence are prioritized in any additional deployments or international support to help the Government of Haiti tackle the armed gangs.
- Call on the United Nations and other international partners to support the Government of Haiti in the development, financing and implementation of a national action plan on women and peace and security and urge that women's civil society organizations have a lead role in its elaboration.
- Recall that all humanitarian efforts must be based on systematic gender analysis, collect age-, sex- and disability-disaggregated data, ensure that local women's organizations are meaningfully involved at all stages, and strengthen the capacities of State institutions in this regard.
- Urge that women's organizations be included in humanitarian and disaster risk coordination mechanisms at the national, departmental and local levels, and support investments in the capacity and resources of women's organizations in preventing and responding to disasters.
- Provide direct financial support to women-led local peacebuilding initiatives, including through long-term and flexible funding for civil society organizations, and support coalition building among women's networks and the mobilization of women as peace mediators at the community level.
- Encourage international partners to scale up their support to reproductive health and gender-based violence services, including to address gang-related violence, and urge humanitarian and development actors to provide holistic and victim-centred services that encompass medical and psychological support and legal, socioeconomic and reintegration assistance.

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in this meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, in consultation with other United Nations entities, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. They are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council members.

- Urge the Government and its international partners to strengthen capacity and coordination efforts in the relevant units within the Haitian National Police and the justice system working on sexual violence.

The Co-Chairs thanked the participants and encouraged all Security Council members to follow up on the important issues raised in the discussion.

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 27 September 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Colombia (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**
Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates
to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 27 September 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council: summary of the meeting on the situation in Colombia, held on 21 August 2023

On 21 August 2023, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Colombia. The members received a briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, Carlos Ruiz Massieu, accompanied by the Resident Coordinator and representatives from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Members of the Security Council exchanged questions and answers with the briefers, and UN-Women and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict presented recommendations and shared additional observations at the end of the meeting.

Questions from Security Council members

Security Council members asked several questions about women's participation in the current dialogues with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and other armed groups, expected or planned synergies between the upcoming national action plan on women and peace and security and the implementation of the total peace policy and the announced feminist foreign policy, and measures taken to address targeted violence against women human rights defenders, social leaders, former combatants, and in public life and politics, especially ahead of local elections in October and including in the digital space. Several Council members asked about the capacity and resources of the gender unit in the Verification Mission in the light of the multiple expansions of the mandate of the mission in recent years, and about the preparations for macrocase 11 on conflict-related sexual violence by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, as well as the follow-up to the recommendations of the final report of the Truth Commission. Council members also inquired about the capacity of the United Nations to support the Government in the protection of Afro-Colombians and Indigenous communities, especially those defending land and environmental rights in territories affected by the presence of armed groups, and the impact of continued reports of sexual violence in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Main points raised at the meeting

- Recalling the recommendations raised at the previous meeting of the Informal Expert Group, urging the Government of Colombia to provide adequate technical and financial support to accelerate the implementation of the gender provisions of the peace agreement, several developments have shown renewed attention to the women and peace and security agenda. This includes the development of Colombia's first-ever National Action Plan on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), recent Government decisions to address women's representation and violence against women in politics, increased support to the Comprehensive Programme of Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders, and the identification of gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the four priorities set by the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization, including the activation of local action plans in

18 municipalities to implement the gender provisions of the reintegration policy. In current talks with ELN, the Government's delegation has reached parity and 40 per cent of the ELN delegation are women. Women are also 44 per cent of the members of the committee set out to define the methodology for the participation of civil society, and Colombians in general, in the new peace negotiations. This includes representatives of five women's platforms and organizations, who are already being supported by UN-Women.

- Despite those efforts, progress in the implementation of the gender provisions of the peace agreement continues to be slower than other provisions, and this has been observed by the Verification Mission, women's organizations, and academic centres like the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, which issues quarterly reports. This includes barriers that are hindering efforts to include women equitably in rural reform, and especially Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, despite the organization of consultations with rural women and the stipulations in the peace agreement to take women into consideration in land title formalization and land delivery and redistribution. The participation of women former combatants in productive projects stands at a positive rate of 86 per cent, but only 13 per cent of collective projects are led by women, in part because more than a third of women provide unpaid care services.
- Insecurity continues to be one of the main challenges to the implementation of the peace agreement. Eleven women former combatants have been killed since the agreement was signed (out of nearly 400 former combatants). In recent months, six members from political parties have been killed, including one woman. There are reports of trafficking and sexual violence within the areas of reintegration, in some cases followed by arrests of alleged perpetrators, as well as forced recruitment of girls by armed groups and femicides of women accused to be in relationships with members of armed groups or public security forces. In the first semester of 2023, OHCHR has so far verified 27 out of 42 allegations of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, including cases of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation of girls and adolescents, public rapes of women and girls, forced recruitment of girls through grooming and sexual harassment, femicides and torture by non-State armed groups. In 2022, the National Victims Unit identified 453 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, compared to 293 in 2021. From January to June 2023, OHCHR also verified the killing of 46 human rights defenders and social leaders, a 19 per cent decrease compared to the previous six months but still alarmingly high. Among these were seven women, like Edilsan Andrade Avirama in Cauca Department and Mariela Marínez Gaviria in Nariño Department, as well as Franklin Pavón, a defender of LGBTIQ rights. In spite of political will and many efforts, the reality for women and girls in many regions, disproportionately affected by violence, displacement and poverty, has not yet fundamentally changed.
- In current talks with ELN, apart from women's participation, it is important to ensure that gender equality and women's rights issues are part of the agenda, and taken into consideration in the ceasefire monitoring arrangements, and that the standard set for women's participation be replicated in talks with other armed groups. In addition to pressuring the parties, the United Nations has also tried to lead by example, noting that women were under-represented at the start of the talks, even in United Nations teams and among the representatives of guarantor countries, and taking measures to address that. The United Nations will also continue to advocate for the inclusion of the prohibition of conflict-

related sexual violence, as well as violence against women and LGBTIQ individuals, in any new ceasefires with other armed groups.

- Ahead of local elections in October, the United Nations is supporting an initiative that builds on the success of the national elections, in which women's representation jumped from 20 to 30 per cent, approximately, which includes measures to prevent violence against women in politics. It is especially important that the highest authorities continue to deliver messages and take a strong stance against any stigma on women former combatants or women in politics.
- The Government expects to present an outline of the draft National Action Plan on women and peace and security in October 2023 in the Security Council. The process of its elaboration has been highly participatory so far, with a steering committee made up of 23 women's organizations and almost 1,000 women taking part in forums and consultations, including various sectoral forums to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, young women, former combatants and many others, and six regional forums culminating in a national forum planned for the end of September 2023. It is hoped that this plan will be strongly connected to all existing relevant policies, such as the new national development plan, Colombia's feminist foreign policy, and the total peace policy, and help address implementation gaps.
- The Special Jurisdiction for Peace has included sexual violence and gender persecution in some of the indictments of ongoing macrocases, but has not yet formally opened a macrocase on conflict-related sexual violence, which is expected to be opened soon as Case 11. In May 2023, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict visited Colombia and amplified the urgent need to open this macrocase, after hearing directly from survivors and their challenges to access justice, reparations, or socioeconomic reintegration. The United Nations system and international partners have already met a few times to discuss follow-up to the final report of the Truth Commission and its gender-related elements.
- The Verification Mission continues to maintain gender parity, including in senior leadership positions, and a relatively high percentage of women among international observers (39 per cent). As the number of international observers will grow with the new mandate, it is important to reach out proactively to contributing countries to ensure that this percentage of women is maintained or increased and that international observers have the necessary gender expertise. In terms of the gender unit and the mandate expansion, any reinforcements of existing capacity or resources would be helpful, but it is important that all components and units of the mission understand that it is their responsibility to deliver on the gender-related aspects of the mandate.
- The United Nations multi-partner trust fund for sustaining peace in Colombia, set up to help implement the 2016 peace agreement, requires that 30 per cent of its contributions have a gender focus and has so far channelled 46 million dollars to projects that have that lens, as well as a requirement that all partners receiving funds have measures in place to address sexual exploitation and abuse. While the United Nations has not had cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, this remains a problem among the broader humanitarian community. The Peacebuilding Fund is also activating new resources to support women's participation in the new dialogues and women's access to the processes led by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. One of the most important initiatives to provide protection to women human rights defenders, now replicated in other countries in the region like Mexico and Honduras, continues to be

Prodefensoras, a programme led by UN-Women and funded by Norway, that will expand its geographic coverage in its second phase and pay special attention to violence in the digital space and threats or attacks against women journalists and environmental rights defenders.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were presented by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.¹

In the negotiations on the mandate renewal for the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia and any decisions regarding Colombia, the Security Council should consider the following elements:

- Demand the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the implementation of the peace agreement and the negotiations with other armed actors in Colombia.
- Urge the adequate implementation of the Comprehensive Programme of Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders and measures to integrate a gender perspective in the work of the National Protection Unit.
- Request the Verification Mission in Colombia to continue to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue into its planning, verification and reporting, and note the importance of ensuring adequate expertise as appropriate to adequately perform the functions added to the mandate, and commending the Mission's efforts to achieve gender parity and engage systematically with women's and LGBTIQ organizations.

In addition, Security Council members and the Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group could:

- Inquire about the institutional set up planned for by the current government to ensure women's active participation in monitoring and tracking the implementation of gender-related provisions in the peace agreement, as well as in the national commission to determine the participation of Colombian civil society in the talks with ELN and other armed groups and encourage the Government to expedite the implementation of the gender-related provisions of the peace agreement.
- Encourage the Government to continue to ensure the inclusion of the prohibition of conflict-related sexual violence and violence against women and LGBTIQ people in all future ceasefire agreements, and that these issues be discussed early on in the negotiations with armed groups.
- Inquire about the opening of macrocase number 11 on conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity and ensure the integration of these issues in all other relevant cases, highlighting the need for women's and LGBTIQ organizations and victims' representatives to be involved at every step.
- Urge the authorities to ensure comprehensive assistance to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence that continue to experience severe physical and mental health consequences of rape and other brutal forms of sexual violence, as well

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in this meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, in consultation with other United Nations entities, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. They are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council members.

as challenges in accessing socioeconomic reintegration, particularly in areas controlled by illegal armed groups and criminal networks.

- Support the call by the Office of the Ombudsman to develop a collective reparations plan with a gender focus, with the input of women and LGBTIQ representatives from conflict-affected territories.
- Partner with the Government in the full implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security, the recommendations of the final report of the truth commission, and the national development plan, including the implementation of rural development plans targeting gender issues in the territories most affected by the conflict.
- Advocate for increase funding to strengthen and expand coverage of gender-based violence service provision and coordination efforts under the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan for Colombia, and direct humanitarian funding to local women-led organizations to provide gender-based violence assistance.

The Co-Chairs thanked the participants and encouraged all Security Council members to follow up on the important issues raised in the discussion.



Security Council

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Letter dated 6 December 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**
Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates
to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom
to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 6 December 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council: summary of the meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, held on 6 November 2023

On 6 November 2023, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The members were briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Bintou Keita, accompanied by colleagues from MONUSCO and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions about women's safe participation in the electoral process and accountability for the threats and harassment against women, both as candidates and voters. The participants also asked several questions about the transition process of MONUSCO: gaps and challenges in women and girls' protection during the transition process, the transition's impact on women and peace and security, human rights and the monitoring of conflict-related sexual violence, and the Government's commitment and capacity to implement women and peace and security priorities. They also raised questions about women's economic empowerment, tailored approaches and opportunities to address reports of conflict-related sexual violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the implementation of the law on reparations for victims of conflict-related sexual violence.

Main points raised at the meeting

- Regional initiatives for peace continue, albeit at a slower pace. In the Luanda process, there are no women directly involved, as the discussions are held by the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Angola. In the third round of the Nairobi process, 1 of the 127 delegates from the armed groups was a woman, and women made up 40 per cent of participants from civil society and affected communities, and 30 per cent of the facilitation team. Much effort was invested by the United Nations in improving women's representation since the first round of consultations, in which no women were involved.
- Preparations for the general elections, scheduled for 20 December, are ongoing. Women make up 17 per cent of the candidates at the national level, 28 per cent at the provincial level and 43 per cent at the communal level. Two of the 26 presidential candidates are women and their candidacies have been validated by the Constitutional Court. More support is needed, including funding, to ensure the participation of women candidates is meaningful.
- Women electoral candidates face hate speech and harassment, both online and offline, and fear reprisals and censorship. The United Nations has provided the

Government with information regarding specific cases of violence against women in politics and has supported the establishment of women's situation rooms as a mechanism to detect potential attacks on women voters, candidates or observers. MONUSCO has engaged through good offices and advocacy with political parties on this matter. The recently adopted Digital Code includes provisions against disinformation and harassment of women online, including strong sanctions for violations. MONUSCO works with the national authorities, including the Deputy Prime Minister for Interior and Security, to support women's safety and security during the election campaign and on election day.

- Continued violence and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have a severe impact on women and girls, especially in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. In the eastern part of the country, Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) and other armed groups have increased their attacks, causing increased internal displacement. Internally displaced women and girls are at a heightened risk of sexual violence, sexual slavery, abduction, forced marriage and exploitation, including owing to the wide presence of armed groups around and within the sites for internally displaced persons.
- Sexual and gender-based violence is prevalent beyond the conflict areas, and this is exacerbated by food insecurity and women's socioeconomic situation. There is an urgent need for more integrated multisectoral centres where survivors can receive medical, legal, psychological and socioeconomic support.
- Owing to a lack of access, not all cases of conflict-related sexual violence can be verified by the United Nations. In some of those areas, civil society organizations are the ones documenting and responding to conflict-related sexual violence.
- MONUSCO and the United Nations country team engage with the armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through different programmes, such as the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme. MONUSCO works with the national counterparts to ensure that women are included in disarmament and reintegration programmes, that these are designed in a gender-responsive manner, that more women are recruited to the defence and security forces, and that the police and armed forces are educated on the topic of positive masculinity.
- At the community level, MONUSCO also engages women to be part of the early warning and early response mechanisms, supports women mediators and equips local women leaders with skills to prevent violence.
- In a letter addressed to the President of the Security Council on 1 September 2023 ([S/2023/648](#)), the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo requested the United Nations to start the Mission's withdrawal before the end of this year. The renewal of the Mission's mandate is scheduled for December 2023. The United Nations emphasized that it is important to ensure that the gains made in the area of women and peace and security are not lost in the context of a reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the country. MONUSCO continues its transition in line with the special report of the Secretary-General on this matter ([S/2023/574](#)), and the statement by the President of the Security Council adopted on 16 October ([S/PRST/2023/5](#)). This includes ensuring that the eventual withdrawal of the peacekeeping mission does not leave a security vacuum and gaps in the protection of civilians, in particular in settlements and in camps for internally displaced persons. A significant scale-up of State-building support will be needed at the provincial level. The same applies for women and peace and security. For example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is implementing its second national action plan on women and peace and

security and UN-Women is supporting the Government in an assessment of its implementation, and there is a clear need for decentralization and greater investment in local and provincial mechanisms.

- The Mission and United Nations country team are currently preparing a common country analysis, which will guide the development of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Country Framework 2025–2029 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Strong ownership of the women and peace and security agenda and transitional justice by the Government will be essential. Additional human and financial resources are needed for the country team to take over some of the functions and tasks undertaken by MONUSCO.
- In the first semester of 2023, the number of United Nations-verified grave violations against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which includes sexual violence, was up by 40 per cent in comparison with 2022. The report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence has covered the Democratic Republic of the Congo for over a decade, and had the country listed again with the highest number of United Nations-verified incidents of conflict-related sexual violence. The latest report (S/2023/413) lists 21 parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, which represents close to half of the parties listed annually in the report of the Secretary-General. Of the listed parties, 19 are non-State actors and two are State actors.
- The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police are included in the list. Since 2013–2014 they have undertaken formal commitments, cooperated with the United Nations and have action plans in place. Some progress has been made in prosecuting these crimes, particularly through the military justice system and significant investment by MONUSCO in this area. Sustaining this work during the transition and in a post-transition context will be crucial, including the continuation of the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements for addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.¹

In the upcoming negotiations on mandate renewal, the Security Council should retain the references to women and peace and security made in its resolution [2666 \(2022\)](#), and consider including the following language in the operative paragraphs:

Demands the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace processes from the early stages and at all levels, including in regional initiatives, as well as in their implementation and monitoring, and as beneficiaries and participants of the operationalization of the national Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme;

Stresses the importance of a gender-responsive transition process and requests the United Nations to regularly consult with women’s civil society organizations across the country on all aspects of the transition, to ensure that comprehensive gender analysis and technical gender expertise are included

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in this meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, in consultation with other United Nations entities, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. They are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council members.

throughout the process, and to monitor the impact on women and girls of any reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in conflict-affected territories (in line with resolution [2594 \(2021\)](#), para. 6);

Welcomes progress towards stronger representation of women in decision-making, and encourages the consideration of additional measures to promote women's participation in politics, including temporary special measures and protection mechanisms for women as candidates and voters and an adequate policy response to gender-based hate speech and restrictions on women's organizations;

Requests the Government and the United Nations to address the serious protection crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and ensure that gender-based violence and grave violations against children are taken into account in the options for the reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the region;

Stresses the need to ensure that incidents, patterns and trends of conflict-related sexual violence, as established by the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements for conflict-related sexual violence, continue to serve as the basis for reporting to the Security Council, as well as evidence-based engagement and advocacy and programmatic response by the United Nations;

Requests regional organizations involved in peace and security processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take women and peace and security considerations into account in all their interventions, and report thereon in relevant forums, including the Security Council;

Commends the adoption of a law on the protection and reparations for victims of conflict-related sexual violence, and encourages international partners to support the Government in its full implementation, including allocating adequate resources to the reparations fund for timely disbursement;

Urges the authorities to accelerate implementation of the addendum to the joint communiqué on addressing conflict-related sexual violence and the respective plans of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congolese National Police, and the national and provincial action plans on women and peace and security;

Stresses the importance of the inclusion of local women's organizations in the planning and delivery of assistance, and calls upon international partners to provide long-term and flexible funding to local women-led and women's rights organizations.

When renewing the Democratic Republic of the Congo sanctions regime and extending the mandate of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council should consider adding a stand-alone listing criterion related to sexual violence, request the Secretariat to include the necessary gender expertise in the Group of Experts, and request the Group of Experts to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue across its investigations and reporting. The sanctions committee should consider listings related to conflict-related sexual violence, in view of the information presented by the Group of Experts.

The Co-Chairs thanked the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the representatives of MONUSCO and the United Nations country team, and all participants.



Security Council

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Letter dated 26 February 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share a summary note of the following meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in the Sudan (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 26 February 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in the Sudan held on 26 January 2024

On 26 January 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in the Sudan. The members heard a briefing by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Sudan, Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS) and United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Sudan, Clementine Nkweta-Salami. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions relating to the termination of the mandate of UNITAMS and its impact on Sudanese women and girls, including with regard to reporting and documentation of atrocities and conflict-related sexual violence and support for the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and for the participation of women in political processes and peace negotiations. Several members raised questions about what was being done or could be done to address and prevent conflict-related sexual violence and support subregional coordination in this regard, as well as how the United Nations country team would work with the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan. There were also multiple questions relating to the participation of women in ceasefire negotiations and diplomatic initiatives and talks between the Sudanese Government and the Rapid Support Forces, as well as within the Sudanese Coordination of Civil Democratic Forces (Taqaddum), and how the international community could support the participation of women in these processes. Council members asked about how to ensure that the women and peace and security agenda is central to the mandate of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan, Ramtane Lamamra, and enquired about dedicated gender expertise to support the mandate of the Personal Envoy. Finally, some members raised questions about long-term flexible funding for women's organizations and the support provided for community-led groups in providing humanitarian assistance.

Main points raised in the meeting

Humanitarian crisis

- Since the outbreak of war in April 2023, the Sudan has been facing a humanitarian crisis. Half of the population of the Sudan, or 25 million people – of whom about 6.5 million are women and 14 million are children – need humanitarian assistance. The conflict has turned the Sudan into the largest displacement crisis globally. About 7.6 million people, accounting for approximately 15 per cent of the total population, have fled their homes since the beginning of the conflict.

- The war is having a devastating impact on Sudanese women and girls. The ongoing insecurity has an impact not only on women's physical safety, but also on the income of their families, as they do not have access to farms, markets or other public spaces. With the destruction of health-care facilities, Sudanese women and girls have almost no access to health care, including for sexual and reproductive health. Approximately 167,000 pregnant internally displaced women will need reproductive health services in 2024, and there is an urgent need for psychosocial support services.

Women's participation in humanitarian assistance and diplomatic efforts

- The United Nations country team has worked with local partners, including women-led organizations, to help reach 5.2 million people with life-saving assistance since the outbreak of the war. Women-led organizations and women's groups are providing urgent humanitarian assistance, using their grass-roots networks to gain access to hard-to-reach areas, distributing and facilitating access to medical supplies and providing emergency shelter for displaced women. More financial support, including flexible support for women-led organizations, is required in order to meet the growing needs. The 2024 humanitarian needs and response plan for the Sudan is only 41 per cent funded.
- Women remain underrepresented in diplomatic initiatives at the regional and international levels. No women have participated in the peace talks held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia or in ceasefire negotiations. The participation of women in the Taqaddum is less than 15 per cent. Women's voices were also not sufficiently included in the Darfur Permanent Ceasefire Committee. It is critical for the international community to maintain pressure on the parties to include women in all diplomatic initiatives so as to resolve the conflict and to integrate gender considerations in the negotiations.
- Despite being excluded from the diplomatic initiatives and facing targeted attacks, such as arrests and detention for their activism and political engagement, Sudanese women have mobilized dozens of women-led anti-war initiatives; engaged in protests in the Sudan; and issued more than 90 public statements calling for an immediate ceasefire, for parties to resume dialogue, for the protection of civilians, with a focus on women and girls, and for access and delivery of humanitarian assistance. UNITAMS, UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme have supported these initiatives since the outbreak of the war.
- Before the outbreak of the war, the United Nations had supported the first-ever stand-alone women's rights negotiating delegation, the presence of gender observers in negotiations with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Al-Hilu faction, the integration of gender equality provisions in negotiating documents and support for coalition-building and joint activism between women's groups across the Sudan on key political issues facing the country over the previous three years.

Conflict-related sexual violence

- Disturbing reports of conflict-related sexual violence have emerged in Khartoum since the beginning of the hostilities, implicating all parties to the conflict, in particular elements of the Rapid Support Forces and affiliated militia. The conflict has spread to other parts of the country, including the Darfur and the Kordofan regions, and there have been reports of widespread use of sexual violence to subjugate women and girls and punish specific communities,

with most of them attributed to members of the Rapid Support Forces and their allied militia.

- As of December 2023, the United Nations has documented 118 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, attempted rape, abduction and trafficking, against 98 women, 18 girls, 1 man and 1 boy, attributed primarily to elements of the Rapid Support Forces. This number represents a 71 per cent increase in comparison with 2022. It is estimated that cases are severely underreported due to insecurity, lack of confidence in police and justice institutions, social stigma and fear of reprisals.
- Women and girls continue to face heightened risks of sexual violence in their homes or while fleeing to safer locations. In some cases, there have been indications of an ethnic dimension to sexual violence against women and girls, where non-Arab women have been targeted, particularly in West Darfur. In Khartoum, Arab women and girls, as well as Ethiopian and South Sudanese women and girls, have also been targeted.
- The United Nations has also received credible information on the abduction of over 160 women and girls for the purpose of sexual slavery. Reports indicate that women and girls abducted in Khartoum were taken to other parts of the Sudan, notably the Darfur region. In almost all cases, elements of the Rapid Support Forces or allied Arab militia were implicated. Some women and girls have been reportedly forced into prostitution or marriage, while, in other cases, families have paid significant ransoms for the return of their family members.
- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has engaged with both warring parties. In July 2023, She sent official communications to the leadership of the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces calling on the parties to take immediate measures to prevent and deter sexual violence and hold perpetrators accountable. In a meeting with the Special Representative a month later, the Deputy Commander of the Rapid Support Forces acknowledged the gravity of sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict and agreed to issue a unilateral communiqué to prevent and address sexual violence, including by conducting investigations on the allegations and issuing command orders that declare zero-tolerance for sexual violence as part of upholding military discipline.

Closure of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan

- The widespread insecurity has severely limited access for service providers and human rights monitoring in the Sudan. The closure of UNITAMS will further reduce the capacities of the United Nations to monitor and report cases, trends and patterns of conflict-related sexual violence and other violations of the human rights of women and girls.
- UNITAMS is in a process of transferring many of its activities and tasks to the United Nations country team, including with regard to gender equality, the rights of women and conflict-related sexual violence. With the closure of UNITAMS, gender capacity in the United Nations system in the Sudan needs to be scaled up to support Sudanese women and girls, including through dedicated capacity and financial resources. The Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan will support ongoing peace and mediation efforts in close coordination with international partners, such as the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. The Personal Envoy has noted that the participation of women in peace efforts is a priority for his office and that, as part of his initial consultations, he will hold consultations with Sudanese women's organizations.

Plans to ensure that gender expertise is available for both his office and the Office of the Resident Coordinator are under way.

Recommendations

The below recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, with additional observations by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.¹

In recent months, Security Council statements and resolutions on the Sudan have been silent on the exclusion of women from diplomatic initiatives and peace negotiations and the reports of systematic sexual violence committed by the parties to the conflict. The Security Council should:

(a) Call on the parties to ensure the meaningful participation of women in any negotiation to bring about a comprehensive ceasefire and end the conflict; and urge Member States and regional organizations brokering the talks both to request this from the parties and to include women and gender expertise in their own mediation and facilitation teams, to ensure the inclusion of displaced women and to report to the Security Council on those efforts;

(b) Reiterate that the full, equal and meaningful participation of Sudanese women and civil society is critical to any de-escalation efforts and to building peace in the Sudan, as well as any decisions about the future of country;

(c) Recall the commitments made to Sudanese women in the Juba Agreement for Peace in the Sudan and the 2019 Constitutional Declaration, including with regard to the transition to civilian rule in the Sudan;²

(d) Demand an immediate cessation of hostilities and a comprehensive ceasefire that includes sexual violence and is adequately monitored, including by women;

(e) Call on the authorities to implement fully the 2020 Framework of Cooperation of the Sudan and the United Nations on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence in Conflict;

(f) Call on the parties to cease all acts of sexual violence and gender-based crimes and to adopt time-bound commitments to prevent and address these violations and stress that sexual violence crimes will be duly investigated and that perpetrators will be held accountable;

(g) Condemn any threats or attacks against women human rights defenders and peace activists, urge the removal of any restrictions on civic space or their right

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

² The 2019 Constitutional Declaration provides for the establishment of a peace commission, taking into account Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and the relevant African Union resolutions related to the participation of women at all levels of peace processes, and establishes that there should be a minimum of 40 per cent representation of women in the Legislative Council. It states that the government will protect the social, civil, political, cultural and economic rights of women, which shall be equal to those of men, and that the State will work to combat harmful customs and traditions, ensure equal pay and benefits, provide free health care to all mothers and create a women and gender equality commission, which would repeal all discriminatory laws. The 2020 peace agreement includes provisions that designate violence against women as a prohibited act; recognize male and female survivors of rape as victims of the conflict in Darfur; and aim to protect internally displaced and refugee women from all forms of harassment, exploitation and sexual- or gender-based violence.

to continue their essential work, and urge international partners to direct more resources and support to local women-led organizations and services supporting survivors of gender-based violence or women's sexual and reproductive health and rights;

(h) Request regional organizations to include the meaningful involvement of women, including displaced women, and the protection of women as central pillars of their interventions;

(i) Ensure that conflict-related sexual violence is systematically monitored and incorporated as a stand-alone criterion for targeted sanctions to deter the commission of such violence by implicated parties in the mandate of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan and the Panel of Experts on the Sudan, and request the availability of gender and sexual and gender-based violence expertise in the Panel of Experts and the use of gender analysis in their reports;

(j) Call on the parties to the conflict to ensure unimpeded access to the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan with respect to monitoring and documenting human rights and international humanitarian law violations, including conflict-related sexual violence, and support the investigations by the International Criminal Court.

In addition, the Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group and other members of the Security Council could:

(a) Request the Secretary-General to conduct an analysis of the impact of the termination of UNITAMS on the work of the United Nations, including on civilian protection, gender equality and the protection of the rights of women in the Sudan; and put forward ideas for how to address those gaps with the support of national and international partners;

(b) Enquire as to how the work of the new Personal Envoy will ensure that women and peace and security issues are addressed, including through dedicated senior gender expertise and gender officers to support his mandate, as well as dedicated senior women and children protection advisers in line with Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence and children and armed conflict, the development of strategies or benchmarks for the participation of women in de-escalation, mediation or peacebuilding efforts, and the adequate transfer and resourcing of these functions and capacities in the work of the United Nations country team, such as monitoring and reporting on patterns and trends of conflict-related sexual violence and engaging with parties to the conflict for the prevention of such crimes;

(c) Support the production and circulation of regular gender assessments or alerts by the United Nations, to both inform donors and partners and aid the regular reporting to the Security Council on the situation in the Sudan, including disaggregated data on weapons and conflict-related sexual violence, among other issues;

(d) Increase long-term and flexible funding for women's organizations in the Sudan and in neighbouring countries, and remove administrative or bureaucratic barriers that may affect their access to funding or their ability to adapt to the new scenario or situations of displacement;

(e) Continue to invite women from civil society in the Sudan to give briefings to the Security Council in formal and informal meetings, and work with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and others to ensure that

there is a risk mitigation plan in place ahead of their engagement with the Security Council;

(f) Insist that all experts invited to speak to the Security Council on the Sudan, including from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, incorporate gender analysis in their remarks.

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 27 March 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the following meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Yemen (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 27 March 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Yemen held on 26 February 2024

On 26 February 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Yemen. The members were given a briefing by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, and the Deputy Head of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), Vivian van de Perre. After a briefing by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

Questions from Security Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions relating to women's participation in peace processes, local mediation efforts led by women, including on water-related conflicts, and women's inclusion in the negotiated road map, including how the Special Envoy engages with consultative platforms and mechanisms for women. There were also multiple questions regarding women's access to humanitarian aid and the role of women in the delivery of humanitarian aid given the existing *mahram* requirements, how these requirements are affecting the ability of the United Nations to do its work and what the United Nations and the international community can do to change this situation. Council members also asked questions about challenges to women's political participation, including how to tackle disinformation and online harassment of women human rights defenders and women in politics. There were also questions about conflict-related sexual violence, including support for survivors and women's access to reproductive health services. Lastly, Council members asked about quick impact projects undertaken by UNMHA, women's role in demining operations and the specific challenges that women and girls encounter in accessing water and education.

Main points raised in the meeting

Impact of the conflict on women

- During the past nine years, the conflict in Yemen has disproportionately impacted women, aggravating existing gender inequalities and structural barriers to women's access to education and health care. Grave women's rights violations persist, with ongoing reports of arbitrary detention, disappearances and violence specifically targeting women peacebuilders and human rights defenders. Women unequivocally say that their condition has become progressively more restrictive since the outbreak of the war, and they fear that the situation will continue to get worse.
- Restrictions on women's freedom of movement, including through enforced *mahram* requirements, further curtail women's agency and impact aspects of their daily lives such as access to health care and education. In the areas under Houthi control, women encounter even more difficulties, including in relation

to their freedom of movement. This also impacts the Yemeni women working for the United Nations.

- The United Nations continues to call for the de facto authorities in Sana'a to lift the restrictions on movement and other constraints.
- The situation in Yemen is as much a women's rights crisis as it is a peace and security crisis or a humanitarian crisis. In Houthi-controlled areas, the use of terminology related to gender or rape is discouraged. For example, the UNMHA gender adviser's visa has been denied by Sana'a-based authorities, and attempts by UNMHA to solicit quick impact project proposals as a potential entry point to promote initiatives targeting women and girls have at times been unanswered or ultimately blocked, including one project that was aimed at supporting women prisoners.
- Despite the broader trend of women's rights restrictions, there is no United Nations mechanism to investigate and report on the human rights situation in Yemen since the termination of the mandate of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts in 2021.

Women's participation in decision-making and peace processes

- The United Nations-brokered truce from April to September 2022 brought the longest period of calm and enabled critical discussions between parties on a more long-term solution. While the truce was not formally extended beyond 2 October 2022, the military situation within Yemen has remained largely stable. Local women mediators and civil society members played a pivotal role in the consultations, mediation and implementation of the truce. For instance, during the road-opening negotiations in 2022 in Amman, women took the role of observers to the plenary sessions with the parties for the first time.
- In late 2023, the parties made significant commitments to a new ceasefire, measures to improve living conditions and the eventual launch of a political process. The United Nations is advocating and setting out different strategies for women's participation in the road map to support the implementation of these commitments.
- Women's participation in decision-making and negotiations has diminished since the armed conflict broke out in 2014. There were no women in the parties' delegations in the rounds of negotiations on road openings but local women mediators and civil society members, who participated as observers, provided advisory support during the negotiations. There are also no women from either of the parties in the Redeployment Coordination Committee, the de-escalation mechanism mandated by the Stockholm Agreement.
- As part of a multitrack peace process, the Special Envoy has consulted with a diverse group of actors, including Yemeni women, and systematically encouraged all parties to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the peace process in Yemen, underscoring the importance of upholding the commitment in the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, as recalled by the Security Council in resolution [2624 \(2022\)](#), to a minimum of 30 per cent participation of women. The parties have not implemented this commitment to date.
- In March 2022, the Special Envoy initiated a round of comprehensive consultations with Yemeni political parties and components, where they were strongly encouraged to ensure that the delegations were made up of at least 30 per cent women.

- In UNMHA interactions with the Government authorities, senior women in the Government structures have emphasized that women must have a voice and a seat at the table and that women's participation should be normalized at all levels and in different fields, including in political decision-making, the private sector and security forces. They have noted that external pressure is essential in accomplishing this.
- Consistent messaging by the international community and, in particular, the Security Council, on the importance of women's inclusion in all peace processes to both the conflict parties and the Special Envoy, is crucial.

Work of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen to support Yemeni women and gender equality

- The Office of the Special Envoy has developed a gender inclusion strategy, which forms the foundation for the Office's coordinated efforts to empower women as equal partners in the mediation process. The strategy was developed in consultation with more than 150 Yemeni women across different communities to identify gaps in past approaches, lessons learned and best practices. The strategy contains proposals for processes for regularly consulting women and diverse local stakeholders on priorities and establishes mechanisms to oversee the implementation of commitments emerging from these consultations. The strategy was shared at the 2023 Feminist Summit in Aden, which convened over 200 Yemeni women.
- Since November 2023, the Office of the Special Envoy, in partnership with UN-Women, has organized a series of consultations on an inclusive peace process in Aden, Cairo and Amman, bringing together 300 participants, who represent a diverse range of local stakeholders from most governorates in Yemen. The participants included women political leaders, women human rights defenders and women civil society activists, as well as youth, tribal leaders, local mediators, local security experts, marginalized groups and individuals with special needs. The aim of the consultations was to prioritize the voices and experiences of local women and Yemeni actors in shaping the country's political future and to integrate gender perspectives throughout the peace process to address women and girls' special needs, priorities and rights. The recommendations call for inclusive mechanisms and a comprehensive agenda prioritizing local community needs. The consultations have created spaces for forming advocacy alliances and networks across communities. During the consultations, several political leaders who are men pledged to integrate women in their negotiating delegations.
- The Office of the Special Envoy has a Senior Gender Officer funded by the United Nations regular budget, and the Office will hold its fourth internal high-level strategy session on women's participation in the peace processes in the coming months.
- Consistent messaging by the international community and, in particular, the Security Council, on the importance of gender perspectives, women's rights and inclusion in all political and peace processes to the Special Envoy is crucial to integrating the women and peace and security agenda in his Office's work and mandate.

United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement quick impact projects

- The quick impact projects represent an important tool for UNMHA to engage with local authorities and communities in need. In 2023, with total funding of \$200,000, UNMHA delivered 256 double chairs and desks to schools for girls

in Khawkhah and Hays, provided capacity-building and skills training for women in Khawkhah and Hays, including in the fisheries sector, and it supports two ongoing projects, which target a school and a health clinic for women.

- UNMHA received \$300,000 to implement quick impact projects in 2024. The Mission aims to allocate the funding evenly between the south and north of Hudaydah Governorate.

Women and mine action

- Incidents caused by landmines and explosive remnants of war continue to be the main cause of civilian casualties in Hudaydah. In 2023, there were 104 landmine and explosive remnants of war-related incidents, with 161 casualties, including 10 women and 59 children. The broader impact of explosive remnants of war-related incidents on communities is particularly severe when women victims are heads of households and in view of the restrictions that women experience on working outside the family home without a *mahram*.
- UNMHA continues to advocate for women's participation in national demining efforts, including through its implementing partners, and has a woman coordination officer working actively on demining with both parties.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.¹

In upcoming deliberations and decisions on Yemen, the Security Council should consider:

(a) Demanding women's full, equal and meaningful participation at all stages of all diplomatic efforts to find peace, recalling the 30 per cent quota agreed to in the National Dialogue Conference and urging the United Nations and Member States facilitating talks to put in place enhanced and targeted measures to achieve this, including in intra-Yemeni talks and in the committees set up to implement the Hudaydah Agreement, in line with the Secretary-General's commitment to advocating for and supporting an initial minimum target that one third of participants in mediation and peace processes be women, while aiming for an increase towards parity in political and peace electoral processes;

(b) Encouraging the inclusive participation of women from diverse backgrounds in the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security;

(c) Requesting that provisions on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence and gross violations of women's rights be included in any future truce, ceasefire or peace agreement;

(d) Demanding that movement restrictions on women be lifted to facilitate humanitarian access throughout the country;

(e) Calling for the release of women detainees and condemning reprisals against women for the promotion of human rights and political violence against women;

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council members.

(f) Recalling the Secretary-General's commitment, welcomed by the Council in resolution 2467 (2019) (para. 11), to ensure the availability of gender expertise in the panels of experts of the sanctions committees;

(g) Requesting the authorities to provide the United Nations with unrestricted access to detention facilities;

(h) Holding a dedicated meeting of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) on the situation of women detainees and consider listing other individuals responsible for repression of politically active women;

(i) Calling for international partners to provide long-term, predictable and flexible funding to women-led and women's rights organizations in Yemen and material support for the protection of women human right defenders;

(j) Supporting the deployment of gender advisers and women protection advisers and the work of the United Nations country team, including UN-Women, to ensure that the United Nations has sufficient capacity to implement women and peace and security commitments;

(k) Recalling Member States' obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and calling on Member States to engage with women's groups and experts on their implementation of Treaty obligations;

(l) Emphasizing the urgent need for the provision of humanitarian assistance in Yemen to fully integrate gender considerations and prioritize the expertise and resources needed to meet the needs of women and girls and address the increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including among the internally displaced and refugee populations in Yemen and including by working with women's groups.



Security Council

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Letter dated 8 May 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Iraq (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 8 May 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Iraq held on 8 April 2024

On 8 April 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Iraq. The members heard a briefing by the Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Claudio Cordone, accompanied by colleagues from UNAMI, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions about women's political participation, including challenges that women faced during the Governorate Council elections held in December 2023, measures to further increase women's representation in the Government, and the potential to expand the 25 per cent quota for women in the Council of Representatives to other government and leadership positions. Several members raised questions about violence against women in various fields, rule of law enforcement and how cases of domestic violence were addressed without specific legislation being in place, and the monitoring and reporting by UNAMI of harassment or attacks against women human rights defenders. There were also multiple questions regarding accountability for ISIL (Da'esh) atrocities against women and girls, including what would happen to the information collected when the UNITAD mandate ended in September 2024, how the needs and concerns of Yazidi survivors were reflected in the national action plan on women and peace and security, and the challenges related to the birth registration of children born as a result of rape and the progress made in this regard. Finally, some members raised questions about the pushback against the term "gender", the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security, the safeguarding of gender gains in a potential transition or drawdown of UNAMI, women's representation in the Iraqi judiciary, and gender mainstreaming across United Nations interventions, including those focusing on the youth.

Main points raised in the meeting

Women's political participation

- Iraq continues to make progress in advancing women's representation in politics. In October 2022, the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani, was confirmed, which includes 3 women among 23 Cabinet members, namely the Ministers of Finance, Migration and Displacement, and Communications.

- In May 2023, the Government of Iraq established the High Committee to Support Women's Participation in the Governorate Council Elections, which took place in December 2023. As a member of the High Committee, UNAMI advocated measures to increase women's participation, such as the establishment of hotlines to receive complaints from women candidates during the campaign period. Four such hotlines were established by the National Directorate for Iraqi Women.
- The Governorate Council elections resulted in women taking 76 out of a total of 285 seats, or 26.7 per cent, slightly exceeding the women's minimum quota of 25 per cent. To date, none of the governors are women, and women feature poorly in the other key positions in the governorates. Most of the women candidates who won the elections were politically affiliated, similar to what was seen in the national elections held in 2021. Compared with the national elections, it was reported that women candidates in the Governorate Council elections were better prepared, with some, mostly first-time candidates, having taken part in training provided by the Independent High Electoral Commission. Nevertheless, recommendations to provide equal access to media coverage during campaigns and access to financing have been made to advance women's electoral participation.
- No serious violations against women were reported during the Governorate Council elections through the established hotlines.
- The federal Government launched the national strategy for Iraqi women for 2023–2030 in March 2023. The strategy aims to advance women's political participation, increase the protection of women and girls, foster women's economic empowerment and reduce the negative impact of climate change on women and girls.
- In March 2023, Mr. Al Sudani chaired the first meeting of the newly formed High Council for Women's Affairs, whose membership includes the three female ministers alongside the National Directorate for Iraqi Women and civil society representatives. The Prime Minister underscored the establishment of the High Council for Women's Affairs as a key initiative aimed at developing projects to advance the status and participation of women in Iraq and outlined the priorities of his Government of addressing poverty and unemployment and creating jobs for women, as well as combating violence against women.

National action plan on women and peace and security

- The National Directorate for Iraqi Women, under the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, is reviewing the second national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) for the period 2020–2024 and is in the process of developing its third national action plan with the support of UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme.
- Political will on the part of the Government of Iraq to implement the second Iraqi national action plan on women and peace and security has been strong at both the federal and regional levels, led by the National Directorate for Iraqi Women at the federal level and the High Council for Women and Development in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Challenges remain in the implementation related to the resourcing of the second national action plan, including from donors and the allocation of State budget resources. In addition, support to the different line ministries and governorates is necessary to ensure consistent implementation of the second national action plan across Iraqi territory. The United Nations, including UN-Women and the United Nations Development

Programme, seeks to address these challenges through support and technical assistance to the Government of Iraq.

- The rights and concerns of Yazidi women are strongly featured in the second national action plan, particularly in relation to the protection pillar.

Protection of women in law and policy

- Iraq’s anti-domestic violence bill has been pending in the Council of Representatives for over 10 years. Currently, cases of domestic violence are covered under the provisions of the Penal Code, which also includes provisions allowing husbands to physically “discipline” their wives, as well as mitigating circumstances for “honour killings”.
- The Directorate of Family and Child Protection of the Ministry of Interior has specialized police units, which are tasked with investigating cases of domestic violence and providing support to survivors. The cases are dealt with in the Specialized Court for Domestic Violence with judges who are specialized in such cases.
- UNAMI, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued a report entitled “Accountability for domestic violence in Iraq: promoting justice and non-discrimination” in March 2024. Some of the recommendations include having more judges trained on issues around domestic violence, more women judges assigned to work on these specialized cases, more resources allocated to the special protection units, organizing training for the women officers in the units, as well as increasing cooperation between law enforcement. The United Nations continues to engage with women judges and raise awareness of the role of women judges.
- On 27 April 2024, shortly after the meeting, the Council of Representatives passed the First Amendment to the Anti-Prostitution Law, renaming it the “Anti-Prostitution and Homosexuality Law”, criminalizing homosexuality and introducing prison sentences for consensual same-sex relationships, as well as prison sentences and fines for those found guilty of promoting homosexuality. UNAMI and several stakeholders, including civil society, continue to engage with the Government of Iraq to raise concerns over the amendment to the law, noting that its provisions are not compatible with Iraq’s international human rights obligations, in particular those relating to non-discrimination and freedom of expression.
- In January 2024, the Council of Ministers decided to close camps for internally displaced persons throughout Iraq by July 2024. Most of the camps are situated in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. UNAMI has expressed its concern over the practicality of the deadline and reiterated United Nations support for voluntary, informed, dignified and safe durable solutions for internally displaced persons, in line with international standards and with specific attention to be dedicated to the concerns of women, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

Yazidi Female Survivors Law and children born as a result of rape

- In June 2023, the Government approved the release of \$12 million for the implementation of the Yazidi Female Survivors Law. So far, applications for compensation have been approved for 827 women and for 753 Yazidis, men and women, who were below 18 at the time of their kidnapping by Da’esh. Some 1,200 survivors have begun receiving their monthly payments. A total of 2,847 Yazidi civilians remain missing.

- The General Directorate for Survivors Affairs developed a cooperation agreement with Iraqi non-governmental organizations to set up a referral system for survivors with the support of the International Organization for Migration. In implementation of this agreement, more than 60 survivors have obtained access to mental health and psychological support.
- There was an attempt to include civil registration of the children born as a result of rape as part of the Yazidi Female Survivors Law. However, the provision was deleted based on a request of Yazidi political representatives. Due to the strong resistance from the Yazidi community, it is unlikely that the law will be amended to include this. The United Nations and some civil society organizations continue advocacy in search of a solution for the children, who continue to live under precarious conditions, either in orphanages or in safe houses with their mothers isolated from their families and communities.
- The main challenges regarding birth registration and identity documents for children born as a result of rape are the legislation that requires proof of paternity, and coordination within the Ministry of Interior. The United Nations supports the Government in the matter by, among others, providing lawyers and advocating for digitalization of identity documentation.

Conflict-related sexual violence, including accountability for crimes committed by ISIL (Da'esh)

- The situation in Iraq has been covered in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence since 2009, with a particular spotlight on the widespread and systematic use of sexual violence, sexual slavery and forced marriage by ISIL (Da'esh) since 2014.
- Since 2016, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has been working to address the conflict-related sexual violence agenda in the framework of the joint communiqué of the Republic of Iraq and the United Nations on prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence.
- There is chronic underreporting of conflict-related sexual violence in Iraq. This remains a challenge in particular for the survivors of the Turkmen, Shabak and Christian communities due to fear of reprisals, social pressure, harmful social norms, and lack of trust in law enforcement institutions.
- There is currently no national legislation that permits prosecution of ISIL (Da'esh) members for conflict-related sexual violence as an element of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The only legal framework used for prosecution of ISIL (Da'esh) members nationally is the Anti-Terror Law, which does not recognize conflict-related sexual violence as a form of perpetration of terrorism.
- The National Permanent Committee for International Humanitarian Law, under the Prime Minister's Cabinet, has developed a draft law on international crimes. The draft law was submitted to the State Council of Iraq for review in the summer of 2023. If adopted, the law can provide a national mechanism for prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence as an element of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.
- Prosecution of ISIL (Da'esh) conflict-related sexual violence is of utmost importance for both the survivors and communities and setting a precedent. Without justice and accountability, there is low deterrence and prevention of cases in the future.

- In line with the report of the Secretary-General in January 2024, the road map of the completion of the UNITAD mandate and its terms of reference, UNITAD is working to share analytical products with the Government of Iraq, including briefs with legal and factual findings. These include among others a brief on sexual and gender-based crimes committed against the Shia Turkmen community and updated brief on crimes against the Yazidi community, including sexual and gender-based violence.
- After the renewal of the UNITAD mandate for one year only, a large group of civil society organizations and survivors' networks raised their concern that survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and other atrocities perpetrated by ISIL (Da'esh) would not see justice in Iraq and that their crimes would be lost in the historical records. In response to their open letter in September 2023, the Prime Minister mentioned that Iraq was preparing legislation for national prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, including conflict-related sexual violence.

Pushback against the term “gender”

- There has been a campaign on social media and by political actors against the use of the word “gender”, seen as associated with the promotion of LGBTIQ issues. In November 2023, the Government, through the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, issued a circular instructing the replacement of the term “gender” with “justice between the two sexes”, meaning between men and women.
- The anti-gender campaign has had serious consequences on women civil society leaders and activists. A number of civil society actors and others working on women's rights have suspended activities for fear of reprisal. UNAMI and several United Nations agencies have sought to and continue to address the misinformation being circulated on this topic through engagement with religious leaders and other influential actors, clarifying that the term gender does not imply promotion of any sexual orientation, and recalling the fundamental principle of non-discrimination. The United Nations in Iraq has also endorsed internal guidance on the matter, highlighting that women's rights are embedded in the Constitution of Iraq and international human rights frameworks, while seeking language that is acceptable to all in documents co-signed by the Government of Iraq.
- The United Nations encouraged the Security Council to continue to support women's rights organizations through the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, which has supported more than 30 women's organizations in Iraq to date, the Global Survivors Fund, and other mechanisms.
- UNAMI and the United Nations entities in Iraq continue to advance the women and peace and security agenda, preserving the gains made so far and addressing persistent and newly emerging challenges. The United Nations remains committed to continuing to promote the rights of women in all of their diversity in Iraq, working closely with Iraqi counterparts. The needs, concerns and priorities of women and girls will continue to be placed up front in the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Iraq.

Recommendations¹

The Security Council should retain all gender-related language from resolution 2682 (2023) and consider these additions in its next decisions on Iraq:

- Recall the Government's international commitments and reiterate that women's rights and women's empowerment are universal values that do not conflict with culture, religion or tradition.
- Call for continued efforts to promote women's equal and meaningful participation in all decision-making bodies and processes, including on peace and security, through targeted measures including in government institutions and political parties, in line with the Secretary-General's commitment to advocating for an increase towards parity in political and electoral processes.
- Request UNAMI to systematically advocate for the rights of women in all of their diversity in its assistance to the Government of Iraq on legal and judicial reforms.
- Urge Iraqi institutions and authorities to ensure the protection of women's rights organizations and women peacebuilders from intimidation, threats and reprisals, including those who promote and protect women's human rights, and enable a safe environment for members of civil society, and request UNAMI to report on incidents and trends in this regard.
- Call on the authorities to allocate adequate human and financial resources for the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security and the 2016 joint communiqué to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence.
- Request that gender considerations be taken into account in the return and reintegration of displaced Iraqi women from Syria and ensure that decisions about children are guided by the best interests of the child and family reunification.
- Recall Member States' obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, encourage ratification of its Optional Protocol, and call on the authorities to engage with women's groups and experts on their implementation of treaty obligations.
- Call on the authorities to enact pending legislation on domestic violence, including legal protection for shelters run by non-governmental organizations for survivors of gender-based violence, and child protection legislation rendering all children eligible for birth registration and documentation, and address harmful social norms preventing children's registration.
- Call for the Law on Support to Female Yazidi Survivors to lift the requirement for a criminal suit to be eligible for reparations and enact pending legislation to ensure legal identity for all children regardless of status.
- Retain and strengthen the critical provisions on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence in the UNAMI mandate, including by calling for additional Women Protection Adviser capacity, and call upon the Government of Iraq to ensure accountability for conflict-related sexual violence and safe access for survivors to multisectoral services, including safe shelters,

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

in line with the 2016 joint communiqué to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence.

- Encourage that accountability for conflict-related sexual violence crimes be emphasized in the context of prosecution of ISIL (Da'esh) members.
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Security Council

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5 August 2024

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Letter dated 5 August 2024 from the representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Libya (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

(Signed) Adrian **Hauri**
Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Switzerland
to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 5 August 2024 from the representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Libya held on 25 June 2024

On 25 June 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Libya. The members heard a briefing by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Stephanie Koury, accompanied by colleagues from UNSMIL and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Security Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions on various aspects related to the participation and protection of Libyan women. Among them were issues such as women's participation in the upcoming municipal elections, as both voters and candidates, and protection efforts to support women's participation, the type of threats and violence that politically active Libyan women face and the key findings of the "eMonitor plus" platform. Several members also raised questions about the arbitrary detention of women and children associated with Da'esh and the progress made on their repatriation, as well as the cooperation between the United Nations and the Libyan authorities in this regard. They also asked about sexual and gender-based violence against women, what is holding up the adoption of the draft law on ending violence against women, United Nations strategies to support accountability for gender-based crimes and whether there are gaps in the UNSMIL mandate in this regard. Finally, there were some questions about the impact of the conflict in the Sudan on the human rights situation in Libya, what the United Nations is doing to counter increasing restrictions and reprisals against civil society, and United Nations efforts to promote women's economic empowerment and participation.

Main points raised in the meeting

Women's representation in the political processes in Libya

- In June 2024, the High National Elections Commission opened voter registration for municipal elections in 60 of the municipalities across Libya. Women's voter registration remains low. Authorities have prevented some in-person registration centres in eastern and southern Libya from opening. While voters can register via SMS, the United Nations and Member States have called for these registration centres to be opened. UNSMIL, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Women are working with the High National Elections Commission to encourage greater voter registration by women.
- In October 2023, the House of Representatives adopted revised constitutional and electoral laws. The parliamentary law maintained an allocation of only six seats for women in the Senate, representing 6.6 per cent of the total of 90 seats,

far below the 20 per cent envisaged for the parliamentary elections in article 30 of amendment No. 13 to the Constitutional Declaration and the 30 per cent requested in the road map produced by the United Nations-facilitated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.

- The High Council of State, an advisory body formed under the Libyan Political Agreement, is preparing to hold elections for its key leadership positions, including its chairperson, two deputies and a rapporteur, in August 2024. There have been internal efforts in the High Council of State to build women's coalitions to ensure that at least one of the four seats would be held by a woman.
- Women remain underrepresented in key decision-making bodies in Libya. For instance, the "6+6" committee, which includes six representatives from the House of Representatives and six from the High Council of State, includes no women members.
- In June 2024, 30 young Libyan women graduated from the Ra'idat joint training programme of UNSMIL, UNDP, UN-Women and the United Nations Children's Fund, which focused on strengthening women's leadership, decision-making and communications skills and enhancing their knowledge of elections, gender equality, media, human rights and peacebuilding. Training of the second cohort, with 30 new young Libyan women from across the country, begins in September.
- UNSMIL continues to support women's inclusion in the political processes, including through engagement and consultations with women's groups and interlocutors. Once the plans for the national elections progress, UNSMIL will provide support for women political candidates and engage with authorities, including local security actors, to prevent violence against women, including in the media and social media.

Sexual and gender-based violence against women in Libya, including in politics

- Sexual violence is used as a tactic to silence Libyan women politicians, human rights defenders, journalists, detainees and migrants. Libyan women have been targeted with hate speech, including sexualized hate speech.
- Ahead of the elections in 2021, which have yet to be held, UNSMIL documented several incidents of harassment of women political candidates, including sexualized defamation campaigns, hate speech, death threats and forced exile. Some women were told not to display their photos in election campaign posters, even if they were wearing a hijab. Some candidates had to withdraw their candidacy, as they were told that even if they won, they would not be able to take up their positions.
- Research on violence against women in politics in Libya, conducted by UN-Women in 2022, shows that 60 per cent of women in politics have experienced some form of violence during their candidacy or term in office. Research also shows discrimination against women in politics, including exclusion from meetings at local levels. There is a high need to protect politically active and publicly engaged women, including online and on social media.
- A draft law on combating violence against women, which was submitted to the Committee on Women's and Children's Affairs in February 2023, is yet to be adopted. The law was cleared by the legislative committee in January 2024. The United Nations has supported the development of the law, including by bringing together members of civil society, the House of Representatives and the High Council of State to ensure that the legislation aligns with Libya's international

obligations and serves the interests of Libyan women, including by addressing online violence and hate speech.

Civic space

- UNSMIL has documented arbitrary arrest and detention of Libyans, including women, for exercising their right to freedom of expression. This includes the detention of journalists, civil society representatives and individuals who are politically active or raising awareness of the elections and political processes, and members of think tanks and political parties. The 2022 anti-cybercrime law and the law criminalizing “witchcraft, sorcery and fortune-telling” have also been used to silence women and hinder freedom of expression.
- Women human rights defenders have expressed serious concerns and fear of reprisals for engaging or attempting to engage with the United Nations. They reported being subjected to threats by State and non-State actors in relation to their women’s rights and gender-related work, including with the United Nations, and that they did not feel safe to file official complaints about the latter with the relevant authorities.
- UNSMIL has been working closely with women’s organizations, civil society groups and the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association to support the creation of an enabling environment by adopting a regulatory framework that would enable both the regulation required and foster an environment for thriving civic space and where individuals could engage in dialogue and dissent.
- In December 2023, the House of Representatives published an explanatory note forbidding the use of the term “gender” (decision No. 2, issued on 2 October 2023). In the note, the term is described as a threat to Libyan society and Islamic values, and the relevant authorities are called on to implement applicable laws to punish those who advocate for and use the term. This represents a significant legislative and societal backlash against gender equality, affecting the full implementation of United Nations support and restricting civil society in gender advocacy.
- The Internal Security Agency’s procedure that restricted women’s freedom of movement by requiring women departing alone from Libyan airports to complete a form on their reason for travelling abroad without a male companion or *mahram* has recently been reversed.
- In September 2022, the administrative appeal court in Tripoli upheld the decision to annul a memorandum of understanding between the Minister of State for Women’s Affairs and UN-Women on developing a national action plan on women and peace and security, signed in October 2021. The memorandum of understanding sparked a backlash from religious leaders and community members that the agreement and Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security contravene religious principles, norms and habits of the community.

Women in detention, including arbitrary detention

- There are severe challenges in gaining access to detention centres, especially to institutions controlled by armed groups. UNSMIL has received reports of torture, sexual violence, extortion and forced labour of detainees as well as migrants, who are held in detention facilities and detention camps. While many complaints of sexual violence have been shared with the Libyan authorities,

with proposals for women's safety and protection, none of these have been endorsed by the authorities.

- At least 25 women and 45 children allegedly associated with Da'esh remain in arbitrary detention. Some of the children have spent their entire lives in detention centres without ever having left these centres. UNSMIL continues to engage with the Libyan authorities to find a durable solution, whether securing the release of the women and children or moving them to a different location. There has been little progress in this regard owing to a lack of financial resources and political will by the authorities. Many of the women and children also do not have official nationality or paperwork, and their countries of origin are reluctant to take them back.

Conflict-related sexual violence

- The situation in Libya has been covered in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence since 2014. Despite the gravity of the sexual violence crimes, no parties are listed in the context of Libya. This exemplifies some of the severe challenges in the implementation of the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence in Libya.
- Many of the sexual violence incidents and threats persist in detention centres, particularly against migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers held in official or informal detention sites, to which humanitarian access remains severely restricted. Challenges regarding access do not only have an impact on monitoring and reporting of conflict-related sexual violence in detention but also on the provision of health services to victims of such violence that lead to pregnancies in detention. Children born of conflict-related sexual violence and the lack of support to them and their mothers are also a concern.
- UNSMIL has received concerning reports of rape and sexual violence against Sudanese women who fled to Libya due to the ongoing conflict, which are currently being verified.
- Challenges for survivors of sexual violence to safely report incidents, including due to the risk of reprisals, stigmatization, threats and social norms, further contribute to the underreporting of conflict-related sexual violence.
- The confluence of armed conflict, transnational crime and trafficking makes Libya a particularly challenging context in which to address conflict-related sexual violence. There is a need not only for internal responses in Libya but also for cross-border regional responses, which is challenging for the United Nations.
- There are currently no sanctions against individuals who have perpetrated sexual violence against women despite the number of cases.

Recommendations¹

In upcoming decisions or products on Libya, the Security Council should retain all existing gender-related language from resolution [2702 \(2023\)](#). This should include retaining and strengthening critical provisions on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence in the UNSMIL mandate.

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

In addition, the Security Council could:

- Recall the authorities' international commitments and reiterate that women's rights and women's empowerment are universal values that do not conflict with culture, religion or tradition.
- Call for women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in the presidential and parliamentary elections and at all levels of the process leading up to them, as well as in national dialogues on reconciliation, and in the economic, political, security and human rights and humanitarian law tracks of the Berlin process.
- Recall the 30 per cent quota for women agreed to in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.
- Condemn threats, attacks and killings of women participating in public life, including women human rights defenders, and call on Libyan authorities to undertake investigations and hold those responsible for these acts accountable, and review measures that may restrict the work of civil society organizations.
- Request UNSMIL to prioritize all activities related to the protection and promotion of women's rights, and to monitor and report on threats and reprisals against women human rights defenders and strengthen the coordination of its response in cases of reprisals, in close cooperation with civil society.
- Call for the ceasefire monitoring arrangements to include a significant representation of women monitors, address conflict-related sexual violence, regularly consult civil society organizations, including women's organizations, and fully integrate a gender perspective, expertise and training.
- Call on the authorities to enact pending legislation to address violence against women and trafficking.
- Call on the authorities and international partners to scale up protection and assistance to women and girls, from access to livelihoods to urgently needed access to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence prevention and response services.
- Call on the authorities to improve humanitarian access, including to detention centres, and enable humanitarian stakeholders to reach those in need, with particular attention to women and girls.
- Urge authorities to uphold human rights and international standards regarding the treatment of refugees, migrants and people in detention, and putting in place measures to end arbitrary detention and protect and assist detainees who have suffered from or are at risk of sexual abuse, and transfer women and children detained for illegal entry, exit and stay to alternative solutions that would benefit from best interest assessment, tailored support and rehabilitation.

In addition, the Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group and other Council members could:

- Propose that the sanctions committee dedicate a meeting to gender-related human rights violations in Libya and the issues raised in this regard by the Panel of Experts.
- Request information on United Nations capacity and resources to deliver on women and peace and security commitments and gender-responsive humanitarian action, and support the deployment of additional expertise on gender and women's protection.
- Engage bilaterally with Libyan authorities on the repercussions of new regulations on the work of the United Nations and civil society on gender equality.

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 6 November 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Myanmar (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 6 November 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Myanmar, held on 30 September 2024

On 30 September 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Myanmar. The members were briefed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Julie Bishop, accompanied by colleagues from the United Nations. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked multiple questions about women's participation in peace and political processes in Myanmar, including the role of regional organizations in this matter, and the Special Envoy's priorities in promoting the women and peace and security agenda in Myanmar and in her engagements with all parties and neighbouring countries. Council members also raised several questions about the Special Envoy's previous or future engagements with women's organizations and women civil society representatives inside and outside the country, the support available for the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and ways to address reprisals against women human rights defenders. There were also questions about the lack of feasibility and inclusiveness of planned elections, the alternative next steps in the political process if the elections do not take place, United Nations engagement with the military authorities and how that affects United Nations work on gender equality and human rights, the National Unity Consultative Council framework on women and peace and security, and how to ensure that Rohingya refugees' voluntary repatriation from Cox's Bazar meets international standards.

Main points raised in the meeting

Current situation in Myanmar

- Over three and a half years after the military takeover in 2021, the conflict in Myanmar is escalating across the country, including in Rakhine, northern Shan, Kachin and Mandalay, leading to worsening humanitarian situation and violence that often goes underreported owing to restricted access to communities. Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by the conflict and the dire humanitarian situation; they face increased risks of trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation.
- The State Administrative Council has announced that it will conduct a census in preparation for national elections, to be held in 2025. The United Nations has expressed its concern regarding the intention to move towards elections amid intensifying conflict and human rights violations across the country, noting that the elections are unlikely to be inclusive and have a potential to further escalate violence.

- Despite the shrinking civic space and insecurity, women have played a critical role in leading peaceful protests against the military takeover, forming a unified pro-democracy movement across ethnic and religious divides, serving as the voices that call for support for those in need and serving as first responders themselves.
- In their engagement with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, women leaders in Myanmar have repeatedly expressed five key requests to the international community, regarding the following: (a) the urgent need for humanitarian support and protection for women, youth and children, especially in areas of active conflict; (b) flexible funding to advance the women and peace and security agenda; (c) direct, flexible funding to local organizations, especially those led by women and representing marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, young persons, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons; (d) the need for protection from targeted attacks against women, young persons, children and human rights defenders; and (e) greater exposure to connect to regional and international women leaders, initiatives and networks around the world for broader participation.
- The National Unity Consultative Council is currently developing a women and peace and security policy as a follow-up to the gender equality position paper published in July 2023. The policy will be finalized in late 2024 and requires financial resources for its implementation. Women and peace and security policies are also being developed at the level of individual states by different actors, and the implementation of those policies will also require financial resources.
- The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General continues to engage with all stakeholders, including all parties to the conflict, neighbouring countries and international and regional actors, as well as with women and youth partners, while adhering to the principles and values of the United Nations, and in accordance with Security Council resolution [2669 \(2022\)](#). The Special Envoy also supports the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in effectively implementing the ASEAN five-point consensus.

Sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence

- There are persistent patterns of rape and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence that target women, girls, men, boys, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in Myanmar. The United Nations has received reports of rape being used as a tactic of war during military operations and sexual violence in detention being used as a tool of political repression. People associated with resistance movements have been targeted online, including through the release of sexually explicit images and threats of physical violence.
- Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence suffer from serious physical, psychological, reproductive and social harms. The cases of sexual and gender-based violence are estimated to be grossly underreported in the absence of effective referral mechanisms and owing to stigma and the fear of reprisals. Impunity for sexual and gender-based violence crimes prevails.
- In the absence of functioning public services, women-led organizations, women's rights organizations and community-based organizations are at the forefront of delivering first line response and mental health support services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and their communities. However, they face severe challenges due to insecurity, the fear of reprisals and a lack of funding. There is a need for long-term, flexible, rapid and unearmarked funding

to enable the local organizations on the ground to meet the survivors' immediate needs and to provide them with long-term and holistic medical, psychosocial, legal and socioeconomic services.

- The vast majority of the cases of sexual and gender-based violence reported to the United Nations are perpetrated by the Myanmar armed forces and affiliated militias, while there are also reports of cases perpetrated by the people's defence forces, local defence forces and ethnic armed organizations. Myanmar armed forces have been listed in annex I to the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence since 2018. A joint communiqué to address conflict-related sexual violence was signed between the Government of Myanmar and the United Nations in 2018, but the related action plan was not coordinated with the United Nations or civil society and is not guided by a survivor-centred approach.
- The United Nations has recently deployed a Senior Women's Protection Adviser to the Office of the Resident Coordinator in order to coordinate efforts to support survivors of sexual violence. The United Nations country team continues to work to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, including by supporting women's civil society organizations and conducting awareness-raising activities in the communities.
- The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict is committed to amplifying the voices of women's human rights organizations and women survivors, so as to ensure that their perspectives and experiences are brought before the international community and the Security Council and to bring to light ongoing patterns of conflict-related sexual violence in Myanmar.

Humanitarian situation

- The humanitarian situation in Myanmar is dire. It is estimated that more than 18.6 million people, including 9.7 million women and girls, are in a need of humanitarian assistance, and the number continues to grow. More than 3 million people are internally displaced. A health system in crisis has left millions without safe shelter, education, adequate food and nutrition, or clean drinking water. The deepening humanitarian needs have been compounded by recent outbreaks of acute watery diarrhoea and cholera, as well as flooding caused by Typhoon Yagi. Humanitarian actors have only limited access to certain parts of the country, and fewer than half of the 5.3 million people targeted by the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 have been reached. The 2024 Plan remains critically underfunded, with only 27 per cent of the funding having been received as at July 2024.
- The situation of Rohingya women and girls in Rakhine State has further deteriorated. Restrictions on mobility, systemic discrimination and extortion practices continue to hinder freedom of movement and women's and girls' access to education, employment and services, especially health services, which is particularly concerning for victims of sexual violence and for those in need of urgent medical and reproductive care. The United Nations also continues to engage with Bangladesh and other actors, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, on the situation in Cox's Bazar.
- Local women's rights organizations and women-led organizations are at the forefront of delivering humanitarian assistance and life-saving services, often bridging the gaps in humanitarian access in hard-to-reach areas, where other humanitarian actors are unable to reach the people in need. The Myanmar Humanitarian Fund and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund provide

support to local women's organizations working to respond to the humanitarian crisis.

Recommendations¹

In upcoming decisions on Myanmar, the Security Council should retain all existing gender-related language from resolution 2669 (2022) and urge its full implementation. In addition, the Security Council could:

- Recognize the leading role of women in the peaceful protests following the military takeover and the essential contribution of women's civil society organizations in relief and recovery efforts, and call for women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in all aspects of the political process and decision-making, including the implementation of the ASEAN five-point consensus.
- Strongly condemn threats, attacks, killings and all violence, including conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, against civilians, including women and girls, and call for the immediate release of all arbitrarily detained prisoners, including women human rights defenders, activists, protesters, lawyers and journalists, and urge that perpetrators of sexual violence be held accountable.
- Call for immediate and unhindered access for independent monitors to the territory of Myanmar, including for the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.
- Call for the lifting of movement restrictions affecting Rohingya people and ensure full, safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to all people in need, with due attention to the differentiated needs of women and girls.
- Call upon the authorities and international partners to scale up protection and assistance to women and girls, from access to livelihoods to urgently needed access to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence prevention and response services, and to meet the special needs of internally displaced populations and refugees.
- Call upon the Myanmar armed forces, including related forces and affiliated militias, to engage with the United Nations to agree on a joint action plan to end and prevent the killing and maiming of children, sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the abduction of children.

In addition, Council members could:

- Support the efforts of the Special Envoy to engage systematically with women from civil society, in and outside the country, and to collaborate with the United Nations and ASEAN in advancing the women and peace and security agenda.
- Request the Special Envoy to provide periodic updates on initiatives and challenges in implementing women and peace and security commitments, her engagements with all stakeholders, including women-led civil society organizations, and the availability of gender expertise and capacity in her office.
- Urge ASEAN to prioritize women's full, equal, safe and meaningful participation in all diplomatic efforts to end the crisis.

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

- Consistently condemn attacks against women human rights defenders and express solidarity and support, as well as ensure a safe and enabling environment that eliminates any restrictions on their work.
- Call for international partners to provide long-term, predictable and flexible funding to women-led and women's rights organizations in Myanmar and to provide material support for the protection of women human right defenders, as well as funding for frontline services and protection and assistance programmes that provide holistic support services for survivors of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence.
- Engage meaningfully with women's civil society organizations in all discussions about ways to enhance accountability and advance international justice, including sanctions, embargoes and the use of international courts and national courts in countries with universal jurisdiction laws.
- Advocate the full implementation of the provisional measures imposed by the International Court of Justice and the referral of the situation in Myanmar to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court under article 14 of the Rome Statute, requesting an investigation into alleged crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence.
- Provide support for the documentation of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, perpetrated in Myanmar.
- Organize open meetings of the Security Council on Myanmar and invite the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and women from civil society to provide regular briefings.

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 17 December 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group with women's protection advisers on preventing and addressing sexual violence in conflict (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 17 December 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting of 14 November 2024 with women's protection advisers focused on implementing the mandate to prevent and address sexual violence in conflict

The Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security met on 14 November 2024 with a representative from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and five senior women's protection advisers deployed in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Office of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine. The aim of the meeting was to discuss strategies and approaches for advancing the implementation of the mandate to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence, building upon the recommendations of the previous dedicated meeting, held on 16 November 2022, on the role and contribution of women's protection advisers.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council enquired about ways to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of the work of senior women's protection advisers in contexts of mission transitions and drawdowns. Council members asked about the extent to which such advisers were able to leverage humanitarian funding for the purposes of their work and what challenges existed to accessing such funding. Members also asked about strategies for working with different mission components, including women peacekeepers, and ways to engage local women's organizations. Other questions were focused on the configuration of the women's protection adviser structure, the efficiency of embedding women's protection advisers in different United Nations entities, and available staffing to support the work on conflict-related sexual violence. In addition, members asked about one-stop-centres for survivors of such violence and whether those might be replicated in different contexts.

Main points raised in the meeting

The representative from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict highlighted that conflict-related sexual violence continued to be used as a tactic of war, terrorism, torture and political repression in contexts affected by armed conflict. The representative noted that in 2023 there had been a 50 per cent increase in cases of such violence verified by women's protection advisers compared with 2022. He highlighted that while the Office consistently called for the deployment of women's protection advisers, ongoing mission transitions and accelerated drawdowns, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Iraq, Somalia and the Sudan – contexts where conflict and insecurity persisted – the gains made in protection and service provision were at risk of being rolled back. He stressed the need for the integration of the roles of women's protection advisers into the regular budget of the United Nations, including

during transition planning processes and through the allocation of sufficient funding for contexts in which those capacities remained inadequate or non-existent. He underlined that due consideration should be given to the deployment of women's protection advisers to resident and humanitarian coordinator's offices, and noted that those roles were currently deployed in only 10 out of 25 situations covered by the sexual violence in conflict mandate and that their deployment enhanced the capacity of the United Nations to monitor and report on sexual violence. He also noted that the 2024 annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence had been launched and that women's protection advisers, who convened the working groups on monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements relating to such violence, were essential to the collection and verification of information thereon. Two senior women's protection advisers had recently been deployed at the regional level to monitor and respond to cross-border patterns of conflict-related sexual violence, given the nexus with conflict-driven trafficking, displacement, violent extremism and transnational organized crime. One senior women's protection adviser had been deployed to the United Nations Office to the African Union to enhance cooperation with the African Union, and a second senior women's protection adviser had been deployed to Bangkok to ensure coverage of conflict-related sexual violence incidents, patterns and trends from a regional perspective. The representative stressed that women's protection advisers, mandated through Security Council resolution [1888 \(2009\)](#), remained one of the three operational arms of the mandate, alongside the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict and the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network, which was composed of 26 United Nations entities.

Central African Republic

The senior women's protection adviser from MINUSCA recalled that the 2019 joint communiqué between the Government of the Central African Republic and the United Nations on addressing conflict-related sexual violence had been the basis for the adoption, on 25 June 2024, of a second-generation national action plan for the period 2024–2028 on preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence committed by the authorities. Further, the Government had launched the development of a specific national action plan for the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic on preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence, with the support of MINUSCA and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In addition, on 9 October 2024, a strategic five-year plan for the joint rapid response unit to prevent sexual violence against women and children and human trafficking had been validated by the Government, and was aimed at enhancing victims' access to holistic services, including psychosocial and medical support, and an increased regional footprint of the unit. She highlighted that conflict-related sexual violence persisted in the Central African Republic, and was committed primarily in the context of attacks by armed groups to control territory and natural resources, or during operations by the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic against those groups. Moreover, she indicated that the situation was exacerbated by the humanitarian and security situation, the lack of the presence of State institutions, especially in remote areas, and justice and accountability gaps. While conflict-related sexual violence was perpetrated mainly by armed groups, elements of the national defence and security forces had also been implicated. The adviser outlined hotspots for such violence in the country, including the Haut-Oubangui region, the borders of the Fertit region and around mining sites and transhumance corridors, with sexual violence perpetrated in the form of rape, gang rape, forced marriage, sexual slavery and sexual assault. She noted that those incidents remained underreported and late-reported due to stigmatization, fear of reprisals, the absence of support services and a lack of

prospects for remedy or justice. She further noted that, in remote and hard-to-reach areas, there was a lack of post-rape kits, which was compounded by a lack of service providers of legal, psychosocial and medical services. The adviser highlighted that MINUSCA was strengthening an early warning approach through the analysis of risk indicators for conflict-related sexual violence and continued to consistently provide training to the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic, the police and the gendarmerie on the prevention of and response to such violence, as well as awareness-raising sessions at the community level to combat stigmatization and to encourage survivors to seek assistance and come forward. With regard to transitions, she highlighted that the working group on monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements relating to conflict-related sexual violence was co-chaired with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and that the women's protection unit within MINUSCA had been consolidated within the Human Rights Office and was currently supported by additional mission staff, as well as two seconded gratis personnel.

Haiti

The senior women's protection adviser from BINUH highlighted the worsening security situation in Haiti, marked by gang violence and armed actors targeting civilians, including in their homes, exposing women and children to heightened risks of abuse. The use of sexual violence as a tool of control, coercion and territorial control by armed actors remained a grave concern in Haiti. From January to July 2024, humanitarian organizations had recorded 4,451 cases of sexual and gender-based violence, 69 per cent of which were cases of sexual violence, disproportionately affecting women and girls. While most incidents of conflict-related sexual violence occurred within the communities, there were reported risks in sites for internally displaced persons, with the use of sexual violence to assert power. While survivors experienced barriers to coming forward, qualitative research by BINUH and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicated that sexual violence was pervasive but highly underreported, due to fear of retaliation, social stigma, mistrust of the police and justice system, and lack of available services. The insufficient availability of medical and psychosocial support had an impact on the recovery and reintegration of survivors. Following the deployment of the senior women's protection adviser to BINUH in July 2024, the working group on monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements in Haiti had been established in September to enhance information-gathering and the analysis of patterns and trends related to conflict-related sexual violence. Due to the current volatile situation, the full implementation of the national plan to combat violence against women remained challenging. However, the Ministry of Women's Affairs Women's Rights had recently established a national working group on gender aimed at mobilizing the support of the international community. BINUH and OHCHR continued to build the capacity of Haitian police to respond to conflict-related sexual violence and continued to provide tailored support to accountability processes, including to the recently established commission for the prioritization of sexual violence cases and the specialized judicial chambers in Port-au-Prince for addressing mass crimes, including sexual violence. The official decree to operationalize that chamber remained pending, however. The senior women's protection adviser recommended strengthening the capacities of national authorities to address conflict-related sexual violence, as well as those of civil society organizations, which played a crucial role in service provision. Furthermore, she highlighted the need to create an enabling environment for victims to report incidents and apply a survivor-centred approach grounded in prevention, services and justice, and recommended bolstering the capacities of United Nations entities and service providers to gather information on incidents, patterns and trends related to sexual violence to guide operational

responses. With regard to staffing, the adviser noted that she operated as a one-person unit, while recruitment was under way for one national and one international staff member. She further stressed that the women's protection section was embedded within the Human Rights Office of BINUH but noted that inconsistent funding and temporary staff contracts created difficult staffing conditions.

Somalia

The senior women's protection adviser from UNTMIS noted the fragile political situation, protracted conflict, recurring humanitarian crises, structural gender inequality and limited access to justice in Somalia, which continued to expose civilians, in particular women and girls, to heightened risks of sexual violence. Clan protection for alleged perpetrators and restricted access to areas controlled by Al-Shabaab, as well as victim-blaming, further prevented the reporting of conflict-related sexual violence. Between January and October 2024, UNTMIS recorded 14 incidents of such violence affecting 34 survivors, of which 18 were women and 16 were girls, including 18 internally displaced persons. Documented forms of conflict-related sexual violence included rape, gang rape and forced marriage, which was consistent with trends and patterns recorded during the previous seven years. A joint UNTMIS and OHCHR report published in April 2024 had included recommendations to key stakeholders for addressing challenges, including by combating stigmatization and discrimination, strengthening gender-sensitive responses, enhancing support for survivors and strengthening legal and policy frameworks. The Federal Government of Somalia had advanced in the drafting of a national policy for civilian protection aimed at ensuring the protection of civilians in line with international humanitarian and human rights law. The policy outlined specific measures to prevent various types of threats that civilians faced, including conflict-related sexual violence. In December 2023, the Government had further approved the Offences of Rape and Indecency Bill, which UNTMIS was supporting to ensure its alignment with the human rights obligations of Somalia, and which replaced the previous Sexual Offences Bill. The senior women's protection adviser noted a decline in funding for gender-based violence service providers during 2024, which had resulted in restricted access to healthcare and psychosocial and legal services for survivors, with 43 survivor support facilities having closed. Throughout the mission transition, UNTMIS would continue to support the Government in addressing conflict-related sexual violence through the implementation of the 2013 joint communiqué. The work of UNTMIS related to conflict-related sexual violence was challenging, as the topic was perceived as politicized and highly sensitive in Somalia. In the meantime, the adviser had been able to integrate measures on addressing such violence in the humanitarian response plan for Somalia. With regard to staffing, he noted that the team comprised an international staff member and a national staff member, both of whom were embedded in the UNTMIS human rights component. In addition, the work relied on the support of human rights officers, but the limited number of staff dedicated to conflict-related sexual violence remained a challenge.

South Sudan

The senior women's protection adviser from UNMISS highlighted that the challenges related to reporting and access to services for survivors, as noted by senior women's protection advisers in other contexts, were also prevalent in South Sudan. Recalling the briefing of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan to the Security Council on 7 November 2024, the adviser noted that the postponement of the elections in South Sudan to December 2026 could have some impacts on the implementation of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, including the provisions on preventing conflict-related sexual violence. Moreover, there had been an increase in subnational

violence in the country, as the rainy season came to an end, which had included a spike in conflict-related sexual violence in different parts of the country, notably in Upper Nile, Central Equatoria and Warrap States. Between June and October 2024, UNMISS had documented cases of such violence affecting 88 survivors in Tambura County, including the use of new tactics of sexual violence, such as women being forced to terminate pregnancies due to the fathers belonging to a different ethnicity. In the third quarter of 2024, UNMISS had verified 93 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence affecting 96 survivors, of which 62 were women, 32 were girls and 2 were men, representing a 106 per cent increase compared with the previous quarter. Perpetrators included community-based or civil defence groups, unidentified armed groups and State actors. The adviser provided information on the implementation of a project that supported 195 survivors of conflict-related sexual violence who had been held in captivity on military bases in Western Equatoria State, with a focus on reintegration and livelihood opportunities. She stressed the importance of mainstreaming the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence within UNMISS activities and, in particular, the military component of the Mission. She noted that, during the previous quarter, over 1,700 patrols to combat conflict-related sexual violence had been conducted by the UNMISS force. That had helped to foster community trust and raise awareness about the importance of timely reporting. However, she also highlighted that justice and accountability remained elusive and that stronger legal frameworks, as well as adequate resourcing to ensure access to justice for survivors, were required. UNMISS continued to support the South Sudanese authorities in the implementation of the Action Plan for the Armed Forces on addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in South Sudan. The implementation of the Action Plan included an emphasis on the training of, awareness-raising among and accountability and oversight of the defence and security forces. It remained only partially implemented, however. The adviser noted that while the responsibilities of UNMISS with regard to addressing conflict-related sexual violence were extended with each mandate renewal, the allocated financial and human resources to meet those objectives remained inadequate. She emphasized that UNFPA co-chaired the working group on monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements relating to conflict-related sexual violence, which would allow for the handing over of the working group in the event of a transition. Further, UNMISS collaborated with women's rights organizations through a joint consultation forum of organizations working on conflict-related sexual violence. With regard to staffing, the adviser noted that her unit was embedded within the mission's human rights component and that while support from human rights officers in field locations was provided, the needs far outweighed the available human resources.

Ukraine

The senior women's protection adviser from the Office of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine noted that, between the full-scale invasion and August 2024, the human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine had documented 376 cases of conflict-related sexual violence. Of those, 342 cases had been perpetrated by Russian Federation forces against 236 men, 94 women, 10 girls and 2 boys. Thirty-four documented cases had been perpetrated by Ukrainian forces against 26 men and 8 women. However, due to chronic underreporting, such figures should be understood as indicative only. The work to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence was anchored in the 2022 framework of cooperation signed between the United Nations and the Government of Ukraine. The framework of cooperation was implemented through an inter-agency working group, led by the Government and supported by the United Nations and civil society, and with the strong influence of survivors. Through United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, a joint programme had been launched between six United Nations entities, to support

accountability, reparations and trafficking. The Government of Ukraine had established partnerships with women's rights organizations, and the United Nations continued to support survivors' networks, which were at the forefront of the response to those incidents. The United Nations had embedded national experts on addressing conflict-related sexual violence into government institutions, at their request, and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict had supported the establishment of a conflict-related sexual violence specialized unit within the Office of the Prosecutor General, which had contributed to strengthening the capacities of investigators and prosecutors. A draft law on the recognition of the status of and interim reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence had advanced in the parliament and was expected to be adopted before the end of the year. The Government of Ukraine had recently ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and had adopted legislation in October 2024 amending the Criminal Code to include provisions on crimes against humanity and command responsibility. Underreporting of conflict-related sexual violence remained a challenge, due to fear, stigmatization and a lack of awareness of what constituted such violence. Due to the volatile security situation, access to front-line areas for independent human rights monitors was limited. Service providers in rural communities did not have specialized expertise on conflict-related sexual violence to meet the specific needs of male survivors, and women's rights organizations operated with limited funding. The adviser emphasized that support for national systems to deliver survivor-centred and multisectoral assistance was essential, and long-term sustainable and flexible funding would be required in order to sustain the work to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine. With regard to staffing, women's protection advisers had been deployed through a multi-agency structure and had been embedded within OHCHR, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and UNFPA, while the senior women's protection adviser was based in the Office of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. The multi-agency structure also coordinated closely with the Commissioner for Gender Equality in Ukraine.

Conclusion

The representative from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict concluded by recalling that women's protection advisers were mandated by Security Council resolutions, including in mandate authorizations and renewals of United Nations peace operations, and called for including a sufficient number of those positions in a mission's regular budget to reach conflict-affected areas and operate in proximity to communities at risk. In transition settings, the Office had called for such advisers to be retained as part of the necessary capabilities of United Nations country presences and for their inclusion to be adequately reflected in transition planning processes, in order to safeguard the gains made in the prevention of and response to sexual violence. Furthermore, it had been recommended that women's protection advisers be embedded within offices of United Nations resident and humanitarian coordinators in non-mission settings, in line with paragraph 22 of Security Council resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#). That would allow for such advisers to provide strategic advice and support in the integration of conflict-related sexual violence considerations in strategic planning processes, as well as to support coordinated prevention and response strategies by the United Nations system. To date, the deployment of women's protection advisers to non-mission settings and to regional hubs had been possible through secondments or extrabudgetary funds, but in order to enhance the coverage of additional priority settings, sustainable and predictable funding was required.

Recommendations

The recommendations below were made by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sexual Violence in Conflict.¹

In view of upcoming negotiations on the mandates of United Nations peace operations and special political missions, the Security Council should retain existing references to the deployment of women's protection advisers and consider adding the following strengthened language:

- Calls for the timely deployment of women's protection advisers to all situations of concern, including in offices of United Nations resident and humanitarian coordinators and in line with paragraph 22 of resolution 2467 (2019), and requests peace operations and special political missions to include an adequate number of these positions in their regular budgets in order to reach conflict-affected areas and operate in proximity to communities at risk as part of efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the sexual violence in conflict mandate.
- Requests that, during processes of transition from United Nations peace operations to special political missions and/or United Nations country teams, the deployment of women's protection advisers be retained among the necessary capabilities of United Nations country presences and adequately reflected in planning processes, including through specific benchmarks and indicators on addressing sexual violence as part of civilian protection and the consolidation of peace, effective engagement with parties to conflict be ensured for time-bound commitments to address sexual violence, and the working group on monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements relating to conflict-related sexual violence be sustained as a reliable information base for timely prevention, risk mitigation, protection and response measures.

In addition, the members of the Security Council should:

- Advocate in the context of the Fifth Committee for the maintenance of existing women's protection adviser positions and units and request the inclusion of enhanced capacity in contexts where it remains inadequate or non-existent, giving due consideration to the retention and transfer of these capacities to offices of United Nations resident and humanitarian coordinators in the context of mission drawdown and transition.
- Call for the international community, in particular the donor community, to provide earmarked contributions for the deployment of women's protection advisers in situations of concern, including in the offices of United Nations resident and humanitarian coordinators, to support the work of national authorities, survivors' networks, women's human rights defenders and women-led organizations, religious leaders and service providers to advance implementation of joint communiqués and frameworks of cooperation on conflict-related sexual violence, ensuring the integration of a survivor-centred approach in all activities, and to promote the establishment of national and regional monitoring and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence.

¹ The recommendations are suggestions made by United Nations representatives participating in the meeting or were contained in the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting; they are not recommendations made by the Informal Expert Group as a whole or by members of the Security Council.

- Support and amplify the efforts of women’s protection advisers in relevant countries through national embassies and high-level diplomatic representatives to ensure that concerns related to conflict-related sexual violence are duly addressed in ceasefire agreements, peace processes, electoral monitoring arrangements, national and regional early warning systems, counter-terrorism initiatives, and transitional justice mechanisms and processes.
 - Integrate engagement with women’s protection advisers, where they are deployed, in the agendas of missions by the Security Council, sanctions committees and/or panels of experts to situations of concern, to discuss and receive information on challenges and gaps in compliance with international norms, including successive Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence adopted since 2008, and to raise such concerns with United Nations senior leadership, national authorities and all parties to the conflict.
 - Call upon relevant parties and authorities to ensure that women’s protection advisers have unhindered access to conflict-affected and occupied areas, detention settings, camps for refugees and internally displaced persons, and cantonment sites to carry out their monitoring, reporting and response efforts.
 - Continue to convene, on an annual basis, dedicated meetings of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security on the work of women’s protection advisers, as a platform to hear operational updates from field-based specialists in countries on the agenda of the Security Council.
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Security Council

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Letter dated 30 December 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Ukraine (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

(Signed) Pascale **Baeriswyl**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 30 December 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Ukraine held on 13 December 2024

On 13 December 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened its first meeting on the situation in Ukraine. The members heard briefings by the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Ukraine, Matthias Schmale, accompanied by colleagues from the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council raised multiple questions about the participation of women in Ukraine in decision-making, leadership, political and diplomatic efforts in connection with the war and other critical areas, such as reconstruction and demining, and asked whether the United Nations had taken any measures to promote women's participation in those areas. Council members also asked how political parties and administrative authorities in the country could be further engaged to ensure women's participation at all levels. There were also several questions about conflict-related sexual violence, including how Member States could support the Government of Ukraine in building the expertise and capacity of the judiciary to address cases of conflict-related sexual violence, how the United Nations was addressing the needs of women and girls affected by conflict-related sexual violence and what obstacles there were to access for survivors to comprehensive services. Lastly, Council members asked what kind of gender-responsive rehabilitation services were available for women combatants and women prisoners of war, whether there were sufficient measures to ensure women's full integration and equal treatment in the armed forces, what types of businesses women led as entrepreneurs and whether the access of women and girls to education had been sustained during the war. One Council member objected to the information and selection of facts presented in the meeting.

Main points raised in the meeting

Women's participation in politics and public life

- The Government of Ukraine is committed to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment and has established a number of positions and institutions to promote these issues, including the Government Commissioner on Gender Equality Policy, the Ministry of Social Policy and a Deputy Minister in charge of gender-related matters in each Ministry.
- Women remain underrepresented in decision-making bodies at the national and local levels. Although two of the four Deputy Prime Ministers are women, women comprise fewer than 25 per cent of representatives in the Cabinet. Women hold 85 of the 401 parliamentary seats (21.2 per cent), below the 40 per

cent quota stipulated in the 2019 Electoral Code. At the local level, only one of the regional military administrations in the 24 *oblasts* of Ukraine is headed by a woman, only 9 per cent of mayors are women and between 16 and 21 per cent of *hromadas*, or local communities, are headed by women.

- The 40 per cent quota stipulated in the 2019 Electoral Code is expected to be in place during the next national elections, which were postponed due to the war. Civil society organizations are working with political parties and women activists to build women's capacity to stand for election.
- Women head 66 per cent of the councils of internally displaced persons and represent 77 per cent of their members. They engage in city council discussions to ensure that policies and programmes are inclusive and address the needs of internally displaced women and their families.
- The number of servicewomen has tripled in the past 10 years. Currently, 68,000 women are enlisted in the Armed Forces of Ukraine; 48,000 of them are servicewomen holding military positions and approximately 5,000 are deployed in combat zones. The political leadership is determined to ensure women's equal participation in the armed forces.
- Member States should ensure the equal participation of women, including in leadership positions, in any global or regional diplomatic or political efforts related to Ukraine.

Women's participation in the economy

- In April 2023, 72 per cent of people registered as unemployed in Ukraine were women. The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine estimates that women earned 41.4 per cent less than men in 2023, compared with 18.6 per cent less in 2021. Conversely, women's unpaid care responsibilities have increased considerably.
- At the same time, Ukrainian women are increasingly engaging in the economy as entrepreneurs. In the first quarter of 2024, 59 per cent of new companies in Ukraine were established by women. Many displaced women from eastern parts of Ukraine have restarted their former businesses, for instance, in retail, agriculture and farming, while some women-owned businesses have continued to operate since the start of the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation. Women are also entering previously male-dominated professions, such as truck driving, demining and police work. The need to support women both in terms of breaking down stereotypes and in their care work, including through adequate childcare facilities, was highlighted.

Sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence

- Between February 2022 and August 2024, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 342 cases of sexual violence perpetrated against 236 men, 94 women, 10 girls and 2 boys in Ukraine by members of the Russian armed forces and law enforcement authorities. Most of the cases were perpetrated in detention settings against civilian detainees and prisoners of war. A total of 61 cases were perpetrated in residential areas against civilians, most of them women and girls. OHCHR also documented 34 cases perpetrated by Ukrainian forces against 26 men and 8 women. The Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine reported 326 cases of conflict-related sexual violence between 22 February 2022 and 1 November 2024, with 193 women, 116 men, 16 girls and 1 boy among the victims. Sexual violence is expected to

be vastly underreported due to stigma, shame, fear of reprisals and lack of access to justice.

- The forms of sexual violence documented by the United Nations in Ukraine include rape, gang rape, attempted rape, sexual assault, genital mutilation, electric shocks and beatings to genitals, forced nudity, forced witnessing of sexual violence and threats of rape. Cases of sexual violence have been documented in both detention settings and occupied areas.
- In November 2024, the parliament of Ukraine adopted Act No. 10132 on legal and social protection of the rights of victims of sexual violence related to the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and urgent interim reparations. Under a pilot project administered by the Global Survivors Fund, in collaboration with the Government of Ukraine, civil society and the International Organization for Migration, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are, for the first time, receiving compensation as a means of urgent interim reparations while a war is still ongoing. The reparation measures will require substantive financial resources, for which the Government of Ukraine is seeking additional support from Member States.
- The Ukrainian judiciary continues to identify and prosecute cases of conflict-related sexual violence while the war is ongoing. The Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, in cooperation with the United Nations on the ground, is helping to build the capacities of national authorities in Ukraine to conduct survivor-centred and trauma-informed investigations and prosecutions of cases of conflict-related sexual violence, and to enhance the response of the judiciary to trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation.
- In May 2022, the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations signed a framework of cooperation on preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. An inter-agency working group consisting of 150 focal points from the Government of Ukraine, civil society, survivors' networks and the United Nations was established to ensure a coordinated response to sexual violence. Furthermore, women's protection advisers are deployed in Ukraine through a multi-agency structure involving OHCHR, UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund, and a senior women's protection adviser is embedded within the Office of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Ukraine.
- National and international civil society organizations receive United Nations support to help survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, including by providing mental health support and support for reintegration into economic life.

Humanitarian situation and the role of women-led organizations

- According to the 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for Ukraine, 14.6 million people are in a need of humanitarian assistance during the year. More than 55 per cent of them are women and girls. Women continue to lead resilience and recovery efforts in Ukraine under the harshest conditions. Women-led civil society organizations are actively addressing the most urgent humanitarian needs and preparing for post-war recovery. In 2022, they quickly pivoted to respond to the needs of waves of displaced persons and continue to offer emergency support.
- During the past two years, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund has provided \$20 million to 132 women-led organizations in Ukraine. The funding

allows women's rights organizations to contribute to humanitarian crisis planning and response efforts and helps to ensure that women and girls have enhanced safety, security and access to rights and services. The funding also empowers women's rights activists and civil society leaders to participate in socioeconomic recovery efforts and in decision-making on humanitarian issues and recovery.

- The conflict has resulted in massive displacement both within Ukraine and to neighbouring countries. Women and girls represent the majority of the 6.8 million Ukrainians who have fled the country and 58 per cent of the 3.6 million internally displaced Ukrainians. Displaced women and girls face a heightened risk of various forms of sexual violence and exploitation.
- The United Nations, among others, provides support to women and women-headed households in Ukraine through cash assistance programmes and by providing free legal aid to restore their destroyed and lost identity and property documents.
- Women and girls in Ukraine have had access to education throughout the full-scale invasion, mostly through online platforms, including with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and others. There are also some underground schools, including in Kharkiv, where children are able to attend school in person. Genuine efforts are being made to ensure that girls have equal access to in-person schooling. However, many children have not been able to attend school in person for five years due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the war.

National action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)

- In 2022, Ukraine amended its second national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security (2020–2025). The amended national action plan is aimed at promoting women's participation in the political, public and private spheres and in post-conflict recovery, and includes mechanisms for preventing and responding to gender-based violence and measures to protect survivors of conflict-related sexual violence through psychosocial support, transitional justice, accountability and reparations.
- One of the strengths of the national action plan is the close partnership of the Government of Ukraine with civil society in each *oblast* through coalitions for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). The Government and civil society, with the support of the United Nations, have jointly developed regional action plans on women and peace and security, as well as 101 local action plans, representing a global best practice of localization.
- The Commissioner on Gender Equality Policy, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Policy and with the support of the United Nations, is currently developing the third national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).
- In 2024, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UN-Women convened a regional dialogue of women's grass-roots organizations and human rights defenders across Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in Chisinau. The around 80 women participants confirmed that progress had been made at the community level, particularly in the implementation of national action plans on women and peace and security. The participants highlighted significant challenges in the current conflict environment, including a pronounced backlash against their work and the increasing exclusion of women from formal decision-making processes.

Funding for gender equality and women's empowerment in Ukraine

- While official development assistance to Ukraine jumped from \$1.3 billion in 2021 to \$18.9 billion in 2022, 90 per cent of the funding does not support any gender equality objectives. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in 2022 only \$44 million, or 0.2 per cent, was allocated to efforts to advance gender equality as a principal objective, which is lower than the average across conflict-affected countries.
- In June 2024, the Governments of Ukraine and Germany, with the support of UN-Women, launched an alliance for gender-responsive and inclusive recovery, bringing together 15 Governments, major international financial institutions, United Nations agencies, the European Union and numerous partners from civil society and the private sector to improve funding and financing for gender equality in recovery efforts in Ukraine. The members of the alliance have committed to increasing the share of funding for projects that advance gender equality and protect women and girls, and to supporting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and women's rights organizations in decision-making about reconstruction, including under the multi-agency donor coordination platform for Ukraine and at future Ukraine Recovery Conferences.

Recommendations¹

In their decisions and statements on Ukraine, Security Council members should:

- Urge all relevant actors to ensure women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in peace and security efforts related to Ukraine, including in any potential negotiations on a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in line with international law, recovery and all other areas related to peace and security.
- Express support for all international and national efforts to investigate and deliver accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, as well as all other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and urge all relevant actors to adopt measures to prevent such violations and ensure unimpeded access to all formal and informal detention facilities and access for survivors to comprehensive services to facilitate their reintegration.
- Urge the national authorities and international partners of Ukraine to ensure that at least 30 per cent of funding for recovery is allocated to efforts to advance gender equality as a principal or significant objective, and to significantly increase long-term and flexible funding for local women-led organizations and support for national systems to deliver survivor-centred multisectoral assistance to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine.
- Call upon humanitarian actors in Ukraine and countries in the region hosting large numbers of Ukrainian refugees to ensure that the humanitarian response includes the participation of local women's organizations and gender experts, deliberate attention to the risks of gender-based violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse, and enhanced access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and rights.

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.