

## **Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2013, Security Council Chamber**

*Statement by Ms. Angelina Jolie, Special Envoy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.*

It is an honour to address the Security Council. I thank Foreign Secretary Hague for the United Kingdom's leadership, and Zainab Bangura, Special Representative for her important and extraordinary work.

The Security Council was established 67 years ago and has witnessed 67 years of wars and conflict, but the world has yet to take up war-zone rape as a serious priority. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of women, children and men have been raped in conflicts in our lifetimes. The numbers are so vast and the subject so painful that we often have to stop to remember that behind each number is someone with a name, a personality, a story and dreams no different from ours and those of our children.

Let us be clear what we are speaking about: young girls raped and impregnated before their bodies are able to carry a child, causing fistula; boys held at gunpoint and forced to sexually assault their mothers and sisters; women raped with bottles, wood branches and knives to cause as much damage as possible; toddlers, even babies, dragged from their homes and violated.

I will never forget the survivors whom I have met or what they told me — the mother in Goma whose five-year-old daughter had been raped outside a police station in plain view, or the Syrian woman I met in Jordan last week who asked that I hide her name and face because she knew that if she spoke out against the crimes against her, she would be attacked and possibly killed.

Rape is a tool of war. It is an act of aggression and a crime against humanity. It is inflicted intentionally to destroy the woman, the family and the community. It ruins lives and fuels conflict. The Charter of the United Nations is clear; the Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Rape as a weapon of war is an assault on security, and a world in which these crimes happen is one in which there is not and never will be peace. Addressing war-zone sexual violence is therefore the Council's responsibility, as well as the duty of the Governments and countries afflicted by it. In fact, the truth is that in many conflict situations there is no Government to take responsibility, so there is no protection and no accountability. When Governments cannot act, the Security Council must step in and provide leadership and assistance. For those crimes happen not because they are inherent to war, but because the global climate allows it.

That five-year-old girl was raped because her attacker knew that he would get away with it. Because the world has not treated sexual violence as a priority, there have only been a handful of prosecutions for the many hundreds of thousands of survivors. They suffer most at the hands of their rapists, but they are also victims of a culture of impunity. That is the sad, upsetting and, indeed, shameful reality.

I understand that there are many things that are difficult for the Security Council to agree on, but sexual violence in conflict should not be one of them. That it is a crime to rape young children is not something that I imagine anyone in the Chamber would not be able to agree on. The rights and wrongs of the issue are straightforward, and the actions that need to be taken have been identified. What is needed is political will, and that is what is being asked of Member States today: to act on the knowledge of what is right and what is unjust and to show the determination to do something about it. Every country in the world is affected by sexual violence in one form or another, from domestic abuse to female genital mutilation. All countries therefore have a responsibility to step forward, but the starting point must be the Security Council, shouldering its responsibilities and showing

leadership. To women in refugee camps or those struggling to survive in war-torn communities, there is no greater power in the world that can stand by them. That young Syrian rape victim is here because the Council represents her. That five-year-old child in the Congo must count because the Council represents her. In her eyes, if her attacker gets away with his crimes, it is because the Council has allowed it. The Council sets the bar. If the Security Council sets rape and sexual violence in conflict as a priority, it will become one, and progress will be made. If it does not, this horror will continue.

I thank and encourage those countries that are already setting a powerful example. My plea to all members of the Council is to adopt and implement the draft resolution that is before the members today, so that the perpetrators are finally held to account and survivors can at last feel that they are on safer ground. Please, do not let the issue fall to the wayside when leaving the Chamber. Meet your commitments; debate the issue in your Parliaments; mobilize people in your countries and built it into all your foreign policy efforts, so that together you can turn the tide of global opinion, shatter impunity and finally put an end to this abhorrence.