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*Provisional***Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict,
Pramila Patten:**

I am delighted to join the Council today for the first open debate on sexual violence in conflict during my tenure as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Allow me to start by expressing my appreciation to Peru for presiding over this meeting and for its leadership on the women and peace and security agenda. The focus of this debate, on preventing sexual violence in conflict through empowerment, gender equality and access to justice, could not be more timely or more in line with my own vision for advancing this mandate.

When I took up office last June, I outlined a three-pillar priority agenda, namely, converting cultures of impunity into cultures of deterrence through consistent and effective prosecution; addressing structural, gender-based inequality as the root cause and invisible driver of sexual violence in times of war and peace; and fostering national ownership and leadership for a sustainable, survivor-centered response that empowers civil society and local women's rights defenders. Another important first is the participation in today's debate of Ms. Razia Sultana, on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. Ms. Sultana is the first Rohingya woman, born in northern Rakhine state, Myanmar, to brief the Council on the plight of her people. Her presence here is a historic opportunity to give a face and a voice to a community that has been denied a nationality, denied an identity, and even denied a name. Her perspective will be particularly valuable on the eve of the Council's first visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh. Indeed, voices from directly affected communities provide the ground truths that must guide our action, and I trust that her message will be heard and heeded.

The annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) serves not only to measure progress but also to inspire and accelerate it. It was exactly one decade ago, in 2008, that the Council adopted the groundbreaking resolution 1820 (2008), which elevated the issue of conflict-related sexual violence onto its agenda as a threat to security and an impediment to peace. It urged us to debunk the myths that fuel sexual violence, and indeed the notion of rape as an inevitable by-product of war or mere collateral damage can never again serve as an alibi for inaction. Since then, the issue has been systematically included in the mandates of peacekeeping missions, reflected in the designation criteria of sanctions regimes, addressed in ceasefire agreements and excluded from amnesty provisions.

Women's protection advisers have been deployed to field missions to generate actionable information and pursue a protection dialogue with parties to conflict. Today, we are supporting thousands of survivors we were not reaching a decade ago. Resolution 1820 (2008) demanded nothing less than the immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians. In that respect, while significant normative and operational progress has been achieved, it is clear that words on paper are not yet matched by facts on the ground. We have not yet moved from resolutions to lasting solutions. I believe that we are at an inflection point in this agenda and must urgently consolidate progress by ensuring accountability or risk a reversal resulting in wartime rape being once again normalized due to the frequency and impunity with which it is committed.

The past decade of enhanced political momentum to combat sexual violence has coincided with a confluence of global crises, including mass migration and displacement, rising violent extremism and terrorism, the resurgence and spread of conflict, and the proliferation of arms. These factors have created the conditions for renewed patterns of violations. Indeed, the report before us shows that in 2017 sexual violence continued to be employed as a tactic of war, a tactic of terrorism and a tool of political repression. Across a range of settings, it was used by parties to conflict to attack and alter the ethnic or religious identity of persecuted groups and to change the very demographics of disputed regions.

The threat of sexual violence continued to serve as a driver of forced displacement, and has inhibited the return of uprooted communities to their areas of origin, especially in the absence of accountability for past crimes. In this way, conflict-related sexual violence has led to the dispossession of land, resources and identity. The trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation continued to be an integral part of the political economy of war and terrorism, generating revenue for combatants and armed groups. Women and girls have also been gifted to combatants as part of a perverse system of rewarding and socializing recruits. A rising trend noted in the report is the recourse to negative and harmful coping mechanisms in response to the risk of rape in environments of instability and indigence.

Early marriage has spiked in contexts where families have no other means of providing for or safeguarding their daughters. This has resulted in more repression, in the name of protection. Indeed, sexual violence both arises from and reinforces unequal gender relations, impeding the realization of women's rights and freedoms. In several contexts, victims have been forced to marry their rapist in the name of restoring social harmony and family honour. Survivors have endured multiple, intersecting stigmas in the wake of sexual violence, including the stigma of association with an armed or terrorist group and of bearing children conceived through rape by the enemy. Often, these women and children are viewed as affiliates rather than as victims of violent extremist groups, and vilified as threats to the communities they seek to rejoin.

The divisive force of stigma prevents family reconciliation, in some cases leading to renewed displacement, with survivors fleeing to escape reprisals by their own relatives or communities. Stigma can have lethal repercussions, including honour killings, suicide, untreated diseases — such as HIV and traumatic fistula — unsafe abortion, maternal mortality, extreme poverty and high-risk survival

behaviour. Stigma and victim-blame give the weapon of rape its uniquely destructive power, including the power to shred the social fabric and turn victims into outcasts. It is also the reason that sexual violence remains one of the least reported of all crimes.

The plight of children conceived as a result of wartime rape demands urgent attention. These children may be left stateless, in a legal limbo, and susceptible to recruitment, radicalization, trafficking and exploitation, with wider implications for peace and security. Colombia is the only country in which children conceived through rape are legally recognized as victims, although the fear of stigma has prevented many from coming forward to seek redress.

Male survivors of sexual violence have had their social status, identity and sexual orientation called into question. In some countries, that can even result in their arrest. Despite some landmark cases, such as the International Criminal Court ruling in the trial of Bosco Ntaganda in 2017, mass rape continues to be met with mass impunity. That means that the vicious cycle of violence, impunity and revenge continues unabated in many nations torn apart by war. For instance, it is a travesty and an outrage that not a single member of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Boko Haram has yet been convicted for sexual violence as an international crime.

Although the report before us paints a bleak, at times harrowing, picture of brutality, it is also important to highlight the progress achieved at the country level. For instance, the Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire were delisted last year, following the adoption of concrete action plans and concerted efforts to prevent and punish sexual violence. No new cases or allegations concerning members of the Ivorian armed and security forces were recorded in 2017, which shows what is possible when political will and risk-mitigation measures are in place. Several other States continue to implement joint communiqués and action plans to curb conflict-related sexual violence, such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Iraq, Somalia and South Sudan.

I look forward to other parties that appear in the list, such as the Myanmar armed forces and the Sudanese armed forces, adopting similar communiqués or frameworks of cooperation with my Office. Another instructive example is that of Colombia, which elevated gender justice to the heart of its peace process, resulting in thousands of survivors receiving reparations for sexual violence. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a former parliamentarian in Kavumu, South Kivu province, was convicted in 2017 for the rapes of 39 young children committed by his militia, as a crime against humanity. That trial brought an end to the serial rapes in Kavumu, and helped to disband a militia that was threatening local security. In addition, hundreds of prosecutions have been undertaken by the Congolese authorities, with support from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, which is part of my Office.

A number of significant law reform initiatives also took place in 2017 to delink rape from adultery and morality crimes, as seen in Afghanistan, Somalia and the Sudan. The history of wartime rape has been a history of denial. On my visits to countries of concern, I still encounter attempts to deny or downplay

this issue. Yet such an approach serves no one — not the Government, not the credibility and efficacy of national institutions and not the people trying to come to terms with the past and build a better future.

No problem can be solved through silence. We will never be able to prevent what we are unable, or unwilling, to understand. At this critical juncture, we cannot lose focus. We must keep the searchlight of international scrutiny on this historically hidden crime. When I think of what is at stake, I think of the thousands of women and children who remain in the captivity of groups like ISIL and Boko Haram. I think of the women released — pregnant or with children — from the grip of a terrorist group, who are forced to choose between their babies and their communities of origin that refuse to accept them.

I think of the faces of the survivors I have met in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Darfur, Nigeria and Guinea and in the teeming camps in Bangladesh. I think of the Bosnian man who reduced the room to tears by describing his struggle for identity and belonging, having been born of wartime rape and orphaned by prejudice and stigma. If the Security Council resolutions on sexual violence tell us one thing it is that wartime rape is preventable, not inevitable. Addressing it is our collective responsibility. The survivors are watching and waiting. We cannot afford to fail them. Looking forward, I would like to propose three recommendations.

First, I call on the international community to give serious consideration to the establishment of a reparations fund for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, to help them rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Reparative justice is what survivors want most, yet receive least.

Secondly, we need a more operational response to stigma alleviation, because stigma kills. Socioeconomic reintegration support for sexual violence survivors and their children must infuse peacebuilding, reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. In cases where survivors face ongoing risks, I encourage States to adopt special quota projects to help relocate women and children to third countries, following the precedent set by Germany to protect members of the Iraqi Yazidi community. Similar consideration should be given to the most vulnerable Rohingya women and children.

Thirdly, we need to marshal sustained political resolve and resources equal to the scale of the challenge. The gender-based violence response in humanitarian settings remains chronically underfunded. Time and time again, we see how a lack of resources translates into a lack of protection.

The report before us should serve as an alarm and a wake-up call to the onset of any donor fatigue. Despite all the challenges, what gives me hope is the way that women — from Liberia, Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere — have used their experience as survivors of sexual violence to mobilize political movements for peace. They have become galvanized and organized in response to that threat, and have begun to channel that impetus into political aspirations to ensure that the dark chapters of their nation's history never repeat. We must support these efforts to enhance women's participation and influence because, after all, empowerment is protection.