



Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Ms. Pramila Patten Concludes Visit to Iraq and Stresses Need to Do More to Protect and Support Victims of Daesh's Sexual Violence Crimes

Press Release: For Immediate Release

(Baghdad/New York, 05 March 2018)

The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, concluded an eight-day visit to Iraq during which she heard first-hand the heart wrenching accounts of survivors of Daesh's sexual violence. She stressed the need to ensure that survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are fully protected and that perpetrators of these horrendous crimes are brought to justice.

Special Representative Patten met with Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and with other senior Government officials, at federal, regional and provincial levels in Baghdad, Erbil and Mosul. She also engaged directly with survivors, civil society groups and with Christian, Shia, Sunni, Turkmen Shia and Yazidi religious leaders. A strong message from the survivors relating to the plight of women and girls still under captivity as well as their missing family members was taken up with the Government by Special Representative Patten. She enquired about ongoing efforts to locate those missing and urged the authorities to expedite their rescue.

Many of the women who remain displaced expressed serious safety concerns regarding their return to their homes and shared their fear of reprisals. "I call on all religious and tribal leaders to welcome back survivors of sexual violence and their children, and the Government to find legal avenues to recognize their children as Iraqi citizens," said Ms. Patten. "It is essential for all to work towards shifting the stigma from the victims to the perpetrators. I also urge the Government to ensure that women and girls who were victims of Daesh are not wrongfully perceived as being their 'affiliates'."

During discussion with Iraqi Officials on the question of justice and accountability, while acknowledging the efforts of the Government, the Special Representative stressed the importance of ensuring that alleged perpetrators are held accountable not only for the crime of terrorism but for the full extent of the sexual violence crimes perpetrated on Iraqi women and children including abduction, rape, sexual slavery and forced marriages. She noted in this regard that her Office stands ready to work directly with Iraqi judges, investigators and prosecutors together with the new Investigative Team established under UNSCR 2379. Her Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence also stands ready to provide support in the area of legislative reform in particular to criminalize war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Iraq.

In Mosul, where thousands of Iraqi women and girls were subjected to rape, sexual slavery and other grave forms of sexual violence perpetrated by Daesh, Ms. Patten was joined by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the United Kingdom's Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. They both called on the authorities of Ninewa Governorate to address the pressing needs of survivors in ongoing reconstruction efforts, including through the significant scaling-up of medical services, mental health and psychosocial support and economic livelihoods opportunities.



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SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

Ms. Patten's visit from 26 February to 5 March 2018 was at the invitation of the Government, pursuant to the United Nations/Iraq Joint Communiqué to Prevent and Address Conflict-Related Sexual Violence of 2016. Her visit marks the endorsement of the Joint Communiqué's Implementation Plan featuring specific measures related to justice and accountability, survivor-centered services and engagement with civil society organizations, religious/tribal leaders and the media. "The development of this implementation plan demonstrates the continuous commitment of the Government of Iraq to address the plight of the victims of conflict-related sexual violence," stressed Special Representative Patten.

"While I congratulate the Government of Iraq for its military defeat of Daesh, I urge the Government to pursue its efforts to rescue those missing, to ensure justice and reparations to all victims of the heinous crimes of sexual violence and to include women in its peacebuilding, reconciliation and reconstruction initiatives," stated Special Representative Patten.

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