

UN officials urge action to prevent sexual violence in conflict; Rohingya lawyer says 'Security Council failed us'

The United Nations Security Council has failed to prevent the Rohingya refugee crisis, and the 15-member body must refer sexual violence and other crimes against the ethnic group to the world's top criminal court, a Rohingya lawyer said on Monday.

"Where I come from, women and girls have been gang-raped, tortured and killed by the Myanmar Army, for no other reason than for being Rohingya," Razia Sultana said on behalf of non-governmental organizations during a Security Council open debate on [preventing sexual violence in conflict](#).

The debate, addressed by Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, was held as the Council prepares for a visit later this month to Myanmar and its neighbor Bangladesh, which hosts hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees.

Ms. Sultana urged the Council members to meet with women and girl survivors during the trip.

Since August last year, more than 670,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar. "This is the fastest refugee movement since the Rwanda genocide," Ms. Sultana said.

"However, the international community, especially the Security Council, has failed us. This latest crisis should have been prevented if the warning signs since 2012 had not been ignored," she added.

Ms. Sultana said that her own research and interviews provide evidence that Government troops raped well over 300 women and girls in 17 villages in Rakhine state. With over 350 villages attacked and burned since August 2017, this number is likely only a fraction of the actual total.

"Girls as young as six were gang-raped," she said.

This year's UN Secretary-General's [report on sexual violence in conflict](#) lists the Myanmar military for the first time.

She said the Council must refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court without delay.



UN Photo/Mark Garten

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addresses the Security Council's open debate on women, peace and security.

Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told the Council that: "This year, in Myanmar and many other conflict situations, the widespread threat and use of sexual violence has, once again, been used as a tactic to advance military, economic and ideological objectives."

"And, once again, it has been a [driver of massive forced displacement](#)," she added. "Let us intensify our efforts to end the horrific litany of sexual violence in conflict so that women, girls, men and boys have one less burden to bear as they work to rebuild shattered lives."

A decade ago, the Council adopted the groundbreaking resolution 1820, which elevated the issue of conflict-related sexual violence onto its agenda, as a threat to security and impediment to peace.

It seeks to "debunk the myths that fuel sexual violence," and rejects the notion of rape as an "inevitable byproduct of war" or mere "collateral damage." Since then, the issue has been systematically included peacekeeping missions.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, addresses the Security Council's open debate on women, peace and security.

But "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," said Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

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.

"It is a travesty and an outrage that not a single member of ISIL or Boko Haram has yet been convicted for sexual violence as an international crime," she said.

As recommendations, she called on the international community to establish a reparations fund for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, while stressing the need a more operational response to stigma alleviation, as well as the need to marshal sustained funding for the gender-based response.

A [concept note](#) circulated in advance of this meeting asked delegates to share national experiences regarding specific measures taken to prevent conflict-related sexual violence, particularly long-term initiatives focused on women's empowerment, advancing gender equality, and ensuring that perpetrators of sexual violence are brought to justice.

The note also posed several other discussion questions, including one about how the Council – when establishing and renewing the mandates of UN peacekeeping and political missions, as well as relevant sanctions regimes – can more effectively promote gender equality, the empowerment of women in

conflict and post-conflict situations, and accountability for sexual violence crimes.

[Restore ex-President's right to stand for election, UN expert committee directs Maldives](#)

Deciding upon complaints filed by Mohamed Nasheed, the ex-President of Maldives, a United Nations human rights expert committee has called on the Government to restore Mr. Nasheed's right to stand for public office, including the office of the President.

"Political rights can be suspended or restricted only in exceptional circumstances and under certain conditions," said Sarah Cleveland, member of the UN Human Rights Committee – an expert body that oversees implementation of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) by its States parties.

["Judicial proceedings that violate the right to fair trial"](#) can render the resulting restriction of political rights arbitrary," she added.

In its [decision](#) of 4 April, which was made public Monday, the Committee stated that the judicial proceedings in which Mr. Nasheed was convicted were based on vague legislation, contained serious flaws and violated his right to a fair trial under the Covenant.

The Committee underscored Maldives' obligation to "avoid similar violations in the future, including reviewing its legislation to ensure that any restriction on the right to stand for office is reasonable and proportionate."

Mr. Nasheed, first brought to a Maldivian court in 2012, was ultimately charged with terrorism and sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment in March 2015. As a result, he was disqualified from running in presidential elections for 16 years – the term of his sentence plus an additional three years.

He filed his submissions to the Human Rights Committee in July 2013 and October 2016.

The Committee's decision also directs Maldives to "quash [Mr. Nasheed's] conviction, review the charges against him taking into account the present Views, and, if appropriate, conduct a new trial ensuring all fair trial guarantees."

The Human Rights Committee also stressed Maldives' responsibility to provide effective remedy.

"As a party to the ICCPR, Maldives is obliged to make full reparation to individuals whose rights have been violated. We have asked Maldives to inform us within 180 days about the measures they have taken to implement our decision," added Yuval Shany, Vice-Chair of the Committee.

The Human Rights Committee is composed of 18 independent experts who are not UN staff and serve in their personal capacity. They are elected for a term of four years by States parties in accordance with articles 28 to 39 of the Covenant and may be re-elected if nominated.

[UN chief condemns deadly attack on peacekeepers in Mali](#)

The United Nations Secretary-General is calling on political leaders in Mali to ensure those responsible for [a deadly assault](#) on peacekeepers serving in the north are brought to justice.

One blue helmet from Burkina Faso was killed in the attack, which took place on Saturday at a base in the city of Timbuktu housing camps from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and a French military operation known as Barkhane.

Seven peacekeepers, seven French soldiers and two Malian civilians were injured.

The attackers were disguised as UN peacekeepers, according to media reports.

MINUSMA supports political processes in Mali, in addition to carrying out a number of security-related tasks, and this was the largest attack against the Mission since its deployment five years ago, and the third this month.

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has conveyed his condolences to the Government of Burkina Faso and to the family of the fallen peacekeeper.

He also wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

"The Secretary-General calls on the Malian authorities as well as the signatory armed groups to the peace agreement to spare no effort in identifying the perpetrators of this attack, so that they can be brought to justice as swiftly as possible," said a statement issued on Sunday by his spokesperson.

The UN chief stated that attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war

crimes under international law.

He said these acts will not deter the UN Mission's determination to support the Malian people in their quest for peace and stability.

Mr. Guterres also paid tribute to the courage of the men and women serving in MINUSMA, as well as the Malian and international forces, who are doing so "at great personal risk and sacrifice."

[Security Council holds emergency meeting on Syria airstrikes](#)

In an address to an emergency meeting of the Security Council on Saturday, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres cautioned against the crisis in Syria ["spiraling out of control."](#)

The meeting was held following overnight airstrikes in Syria launched by the United States, with support from France and the United Kingdom, which targeted installations connected to the country's chemical weapons capabilities.

In a televised address on Friday, US President Donald Trump announced the airstrikes, which were in response to last week's suspected chemical attack in the Syrian city of Douma.

They were reportedly limited to three military locations, but Mr Guterres stated the UN is unable to verify this information or if there were any casualties.

"As Secretary-General of the United Nations, it is my duty to remind Member States that there is an obligation, particularly when dealing with matters of peace and security, to act consistently with the Charter of the United Nations and with international law in general," he told the Council, echoing a statement issued in the wake of the airstrikes.

The UN chief called on the 15 ambassadors to unite and exercise their collective role in maintaining international peace and security.

"I urge all Member States to show restraint in these dangerous circumstances and to avoid any acts that could escalate matters and worsen the suffering of the Syrian people," he further stated.

"As I did yesterday, I stress the need to avoid the situation from spiraling out of control."

Mr. Guterres called the Syrian crisis, now in its eighth year, “the most serious threat to international peace and security.”

“In Syria, we see confrontations and proxy wars involving several national armies, a number of armed opposition groups, many national and international militia, foreign fighters from everywhere in the world, and various terrorist organizations,” he said.

The Secretary-General reiterated that there is no military solution to the crisis, only a political one.

–More to follow–

[UN chief warns against escalation over Syria](#)

António Guterres made the appeal late on Friday evening just hours after the United States, France and Britain launched air strikes targeting sites associated with the country’s chemical weapons capabilities.

“There’s an obligation, particularly when dealing with matters of peace and security, to act consistently with the Charter of the United Nations and with international law in general. The [UN Charter](#) is very clear on these issues,” Mr Guterres said in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

“The Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. I call on the members of the Security Council to unite and exercise that responsibility. I urge all Member States to show restraint in these dangerous circumstances and to avoid any acts that could escalate the situation and worsen the suffering of the Syrian people.”

The joint operation by the US and its allies was in response to a suspected chemical attack in the city of Douma last week.

UN partner the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons \(OPCW\)](#) has deployed a fact-finding mission to the area.

Mr. Guterres deplored the use of chemical weapons, which he described as “abhorrent.”

Earlier on Friday, the Secretary-General had called on the [Security Council](#) to create an independent body to determine who had used chemical weapons in Syria.

Last October, the Council failed to renew the mandate of a UN-OPCW body, known as the Joint Inspection Mechanism, which was established three years

ago.

“I have repeatedly expressed my deep disappointment that the Security Council failed to agree on a dedicated mechanism for effective accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria,” his statement said.

“I urge the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and fill this gap.”