Press Release

For immediate release

Date: 11 June 2014

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Turning the tide on sexual violence in conflict, new UN guidance on reparations launched

Move beyond business as usual to ensure survivors are reform agents

(London) At the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict being held in London, U.K., UN Women today launched along with OHCHR the UN Secretary-General’s Guidance Note on Reparations for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, a blueprint for promoting gender-sensitive approaches to the design and delivery of reparations for victims of conflict-related sexual violence.

Against the backdrop of the Summit, which is the largest gathering of the international community to focus on ending sexual violence in conflict, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka presented the newly adopted guidelines and called for the urgent need to focus on reparations, which are the most victim-focused, and yet most underfunded justice tool in post-conflict countries.

Global outrage has grown as grim reports from northern Nigeria, Syria, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Afghanistan and other crises points pour in daily detailing the horrors of conflicts that affect women. Highlighting that the conviction of perpetrators, while essential, does not address the root causes of violence or deliver the redress due to victims, the Guidance Note makes a strong call to the international community to usher in transformative reparations for individuals and communities affected by sexual violence in conflict.

Reparations, most often overlooked in access to justice processes, are of great importance for women as direct victims and as widows, wives, mothers and caregivers in settings where there is social and economic discrimination. Ranging from specialized healthcare and education programmes for victims of violations to land restitution, formal apologies and victim commemoration days, reparations can provide acknowledgement of survivors’ rights as equal citizens and crucial resources for recovery.

“Stronger action is the need of the hour, and sexual violence in conflict is a front line concern for us. Reparations are routinely left out of peace negotiations or sidelined in funding priorities, even though they are of utmost importance to survivors. We need to move this agenda forward in order to ensure real change in the lives of survivors who have seen the horrors of sexual violence in conflict up close,” said Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka. “UN Women stands ready to support the international community in delivering on the promise of reparations as a means for substantive change in the lives of women and men, boys and girls affected by conflict and to reflect the needs of victims for both courtroom justice as well as comprehensive redress.”

The Guidance Note is the result of extensive consultations and research, and seeks to distill experiences across the globe into actionable principles to inform access to justice policy and programming in post-conflict societies. Studies show that often policy and laws are in place, yet implementation and gender-sensitive delivery of reparations programmes continue to lag behind. To address these challenges, UN Women and OHCHR developed the guidance for the UN system, with principles applicable to all parties, including Member
States and civil society actors who are developing, supporting, and implementing reparations policies and programming.

Underlining the need to invest in gender equality as a foundation to ensure societies with lasting peace, the principles call for long-term, in-depth solutions, such as, not just a once-off cash payment, but access to land and inheritance rights for the wives of the disappeared; land restitution for those affected, coupled with land redistribution and access to credit, skills and means to transform that land into a source of livelihood; and providing fistula surgery to rape victims, as well as income-generating skills to help them build a future.

Key principles in the Guidance Note include:

• Urgent need for reparations to be transformative in impact. Transformative reparations mean redressing both the single violation as well as the context of inequality that renders women vulnerable to violence and informs the consequences and impacts of this violence.
• In the spirit of UN Security Council resolution 1325 and the six resolutions that have followed, the Guidance Note calls for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence to be at the centre, as agents of reform. Survivors must be meaningfully involved and consulted in the mapping, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of reparations programmes.
• Human rights violations impact men and women differently and in multiple ways, and there is an urgent need to develop reparations programmes that acknowledge and respond to this reality and to men and women’s different needs.

Key recommended actions include:

• Awareness-raising activities and outreach campaigns are essential, and must make victims aware of their rights in a language they understand. Equally important are transport provisions and childcare facilities so women can register as beneficiaries; and confidentiality measures to create safe environments for those coming forward.
• Effective consultation with survivors of sexual violence requires building better processes and systems. Being transformative requires moving beyond business as usual.
• The Guidance Note also highlights the need to promote comprehensive reparations programmes which include different forms of reparations with individual and collective reparations complementing and reinforcing each other.

Find out more about UN Women’s work on addressing sexual violence in conflict here. Watch a livestream recording of Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka’s speech at the Global Summit here: http://live.esvcsummit.com/media.html

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UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. For more information, visit www.unwomen.org. UN Women, 220 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017, New York. Tel: +1 646 781-4400. Fax: +1 646 781-4496.