

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 5 April 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that Viet Nam, in its capacity as President of the Security Council for April 2021, will convene an open debate on the subject of “sexual violence in conflict”, to be held on 14 April in a virtual format.

In this regard, Viet Nam has prepared a concept note (see annex). I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Dinh Quy **Dang**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 5 April 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the subject of “sexual violence in conflict”, to be held at 10 a.m. on 14 April 2021

I. Introduction

1. Sexual violence in conflict, especially when used as a brutal tactic of war, has left multiple enduring and devastating consequences for survivors and their families. The aim of this open debate is to examine persisting challenges and identify measures for the prevention of and response to sexual violence in conflict, focusing on the provision of assistance and access to services for victims and their needs in terms of rehabilitation, justice and reintegration. In particular, it will take into account risks posed by the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has deepened intersecting global crises and heightened security and socioeconomic difficulties, as highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence ([S/2021/312](#)).

II. Background and key challenges

2. In situations of conflict, victims of sexual violence suffer from profound physical and psychological injuries, as well as stigma, discrimination and social exclusion associated with sexual violence. Women victims are increasingly confronted with unwanted pregnancies, and infection with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. They also face psychological impacts such as post-traumatic stress syndrome and other long-term consequences, in addition to fears of stigma, discrimination and social norms. Armed conflicts have put survivors at risk of further violence and exploitation, including human trafficking and displacement, among others, as the perpetual cycle of violence continues. Meanwhile, perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict, for the most part, have not been held accountable for their horrific acts. The investigation and prosecution of these crimes continues to face serious constraints on the global scale, requiring the strengthening of the capacity of States as the primary bearers of responsibility for the prevention of and response to sexual violence in conflict. Prevention and response efforts continue to be hindered by persisting gender inequality and lack of progress in advancing women’s political, social and economic empowerment.

3. A focus on the provision of assistance and access to services is of critical importance to victims of sexual violence. Regrettably, immediate health care remains largely limited or unavailable in conflict situations, particularly in rural areas, and psychosocial and legal support is rarely accessible. In many cases, there is a lack of awareness about the availability of services. Shame, and fear of reprisal and rejection by their families and communities, often discourage victims from seeking care, support and justice, leaving them with little choice but deep wounds physically and psychologically, or, in worse cases, to remain with the very perpetrators of sexual violence. Despite a growing number of documented cases, many underreported survivors have suffered or even died in silence without ever coming forward to seek help. These challenges are compounded by existing gender inequality, economic hardship, and limited resources and opportunity in fragile conflict situations. As a result, it is extremely difficult for vulnerable victims to recover from the profound consequences of the violence and reintegrate into society.

4. The COVID-19 pandemic has had negative impacts on situations of armed conflict, wherein women and girls are among those disproportionately affected. In the latest report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2021/312), it is noted that some armed groups have taken advantage of the pandemic to intensify their operations of sexual harassment, slavery, trafficking and terrorism. It is also noted that structural challenges to service provision persist, where survivors face constraining distances to reaching shelters and clinics. In some cases, shelters for victims have been closed while mobile clinics and counselling services have been cancelled. The plight of survivors has further worsened as a result of local security and socioeconomic challenges stemming from intersecting global crises. Lockdowns and quarantines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have in some cases hindered humanitarian access to those in need. Underfunding is a pressing challenge, with scarce resources being redirected to the COVID-19 response. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic heightens the risks of sexual violence in conflict and threatens to reverse the fragile progress achieved thus far.

5. Over the years, Member States, the United Nations system and the international community have developed frameworks and mechanisms to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict. Many countries have put in place laws on gender-based violence or gender equality, while national action plans on women and peace and security, though fewer in number, have also been adopted by 89 countries. In the recent report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2021/312), it is highlighted that some parties to conflict have drafted or are about to adopt policies and laws aimed at combating crimes and sexual violence against women. Within the United Nations system, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network, the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, and United Nations peacekeeping missions have continued to make efforts with a view to preventing sexual violence in conflict and addressing survivors' needs.

6. While encouraging progress has been made, the implementation of current frameworks is still faced with serious challenges in practice. The recent report by the Secretary-General indicates that the level of compliance by parties to conflict with regard to Security Council frameworks on sexual violence in conflict remains low. The adoption and implementation of protective legal frameworks has stalled in a number of countries and, at the same time, some legislations have shown weak procedural provisions and limited victim protection, preventive or accountability measures. Other drawbacks include underreporting and prevailing challenges stemming from gender inequality, sociocultural norms, stigma, human trafficking, protracted insecurity and structural weaknesses, among others. Measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have also led to further limitations on the implementation of policies, reporting, and the provision of assistance and services for survivors of sexual violence in conflict.

III. Normative framework in the Security Council

7. In its resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2331 (2016) and 2467 (2019), the Security Council condemned all acts of sexual and other forms of violence committed against civilians in armed conflicts, in particular women and children, and affirmed that sexual violence, when used as a tactic of war or part of an attack against civilian populations, can significantly exacerbate and prolong situations of armed conflict and may impede the restoration of international peace and security. The Council emphasized that the prevention of and response to such acts significantly contributes to the maintenance of international

peace and security, and stressed the importance of advancing gender equality and women's political, social, and economic empowerment. The Council also expressed concern at the limited numbers of perpetrators of sexual violence brought to justice. The Council affirmed the importance of increasing timely access to health care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, socioeconomic reintegration and other multisectoral services for victims of sexual violence, in particular in rural areas. The Council also called for support to national institutions and local non-governmental organizations in increasing resources and strengthening capacities to provide services to survivors of sexual violence, and requested the relevant United Nations entities to increase the allocation of resources for the coordination of gender-based violence response and service provision.

8. In its resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#), the Council also recognized the need for a survivor-centred approach in preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, and for survivors of sexual violence to receive non-discriminatory access to services such as medical and psychosocial care. Member States are encouraged to strengthen legislation to foster accountability for sexual violence, prevent and eliminate sexual violence in conflict, and strengthen access to justice for victims. The Council also encouraged Member States to consider resettlement or local integration support for survivors, adopt measures to mitigate the risk of sexual violence, make services available to survivors, and ensure that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict in the respective countries receive the care required by their specific needs and without any discrimination.

IV. Objectives and guiding questions

9. The open debate will provide an opportunity to identify gaps and strengthen efforts to prevent and address sexual violence in conflict, improve assistance and support to victims in rebuilding their lives and livelihoods, analyse emerging and long-term challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and reinforce international commitments to address sexual violence in conflict. Participants are encouraged to consider the following questions:

- What are the shortcomings in the current Security Council framework on sexual violence in conflict? How have the resolutions of the Security Council been implemented, in particular resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#)? What are the achievements, best practices and challenges in the implementation of resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#)?
- How can existing United Nations mechanisms, including those of the Security Council, be better utilized and integrated to resolve persisting and emerging challenges to addressing and preventing sexual violence in conflict?
- Which policies and programmes have been implemented to assist victims of sexual violence in conflicts in their recovery and reintegration? What are the most and least effective policies and programmes, and how can we address the gaps in order to better support victims?
- How can States and the international community improve advocacy and raise awareness in order for victims to access care, rehabilitation, reintegration and reparation? How can we raise awareness and change social attitudes of stigma and discrimination towards victims of sexual violence in conflict?
- How can regional and subregional organizations support national efforts and capacities to address and prevent sexual violence in conflict? How can we strengthen political commitments to address the challenge of capacity and resource shortages?

- How can States better assist victims in overcoming economic hardship, and limited resources and opportunity, in fragile conflict situations? How can we empower victims to become agents of change who can support other victims with a view to rehabilitation and reintegration?

V. Format and briefers

10. Under the Vietnamese presidency of the Security Council in April 2021, the open debate will be held on Wednesday, 14 April, at 10 a.m., in a virtual format. It will be chaired by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dinh Quy Dang.

11. The following speakers will brief the Security Council:

- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
- Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Denis Mukwege
- The Director of the South Sudan Women with Disabilities Network, Atim Caroline
- Another individual breifer (to be confirmed)

Member States and observers are invited to submit a written statement to the Security Council Affairs Division (dppa-scsb3@un.org). All statements submitted no later than the day of the meeting will be included in a compilation document.
