



United Nations South Sudan

Office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General,
Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and
UNDP Resident Representative

High Level Dialogue on the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

Opening Remarks

'Addressing impunity on sexual and gender-based violence in South Sudan'

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Check Against Delivery

Your Excellency, the Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Dr. Martin Elia Lomoro,

Your Excellency, the Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, Madam, Awut Deng Acuil

Excellencies,

Senior Government officials,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for the opportunity to share this moment with you on a subject so dear to my heart and so critical to the image and fortunes of South Sudan in the world today. I am pleased to see that so many influential and opinion leaders are here at this incredibly timely dialogue about the rights of women and girls in South Sudan.

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the Ministry of Gender for transforming UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security into a National Action Plan. Resolution 1325 was a watershed moment for the community of nations.

It recognizes that the rights of women and their safety, engagement and empowerment are crucial to peace building and recovery; it reaffirms the critical role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and it stresses the importance of giving women an equal voice and participation in the promotion of peace and security.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a well-known fact that women, children and other vulnerable groups suffer the most during conflict, and even more so when the conflict becomes protracted. The experience in South Sudan has been no different. Advancing women's rights, and the common values of our shared humanity is not something that we should start to address once peace fully prevails. Unless we actively promote and pursue the rights of women, and indeed that of all citizens, there will be no lasting peace - No lasting peace in our hearts, and No lasting peace in our communities.

Sexual violence remains one of the most pervasive violations of human rights in the world, one of the least prosecuted crimes, and one of the gravest threats to peace and development. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are sadly all too pervasive in situations of armed conflict.

We are all living witnesses to the shocking increase in the number of reported cases of rape and sexual violence against women and girls when fighting unfortunately broke out in Juba in July this year. We must all be part of the response to the cries for justice for women and girls who have

suffered sexual violence. We have to do much more to end these horrible incidents and to end the culture of impunity that allows such horrendous violence to persist. The era of indifference and complacency needs to be confined to the past and replaced by systemic prevention, and swift and effective action.

As we deliberate at today's High level Dialogue, I urge you to bear three things in mind:

First, sexual and gender-based violence are horrendous acts that terribly impact our mothers, sisters and children who constitute half of the population of South Sudan. Sexual and gender based violence knows no ethnic, social or economic boundaries. Such violence, perpetrated upon our sisters and children, undermines their health, their dignity and their personal security. And sadly, the aftermaths of these terrible acts are often shrouded in silence because of the shame within the community or fear of reprisals associated with reporting these crimes. Sexual and gender based violence are heinous crimes, - pure and simple. These cannot be allowed to continue!

Second, sexual and gender-based violence increases dramatically during periods of conflict. Shamefully, women's bodies have become battle grounds and theatres of war. The raft of sexual and gender-based violence reported during the December 2013 crisis, and the recent conflict of July 2016, cannot be allowed to continue. It is time for all of us to take a decisive step and say, "Never Again!"

Third, the consequences of such violence on women and girls are devastating; they last a life time, and threaten a woman's very existence and survival.

Excellencies,

As we seek to scale up efforts against sexual and gender based violence, I wish to use this opportunity to commend the Government for demonstrating its commitment to lead on this issue. Notable in this respect is the joint communiqué signed between HE President Salva Kiir Mayardit and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict that seeks to address conflict-related sexual violence in this country. Central to this communiqué is the development of an Action Plan to ensure that the security sector has in place clear orders preventing sexual violence through the chain of command, and ensuring the timely investigations of, and accountability for crimes of sexual violence.

The Government is also in the process of reforming the penal code to cater for gender and sexual violence committed in conflict situations. And under the leadership of the Government, South Sudan has acceded to key international instruments that protect the rights of women and children, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These are all commendable indeed. But we need to now move speedily to go beyond intentions, pledges, and expressions of commitment on paper to practical actions both in the context of prevention and prosecutions, whenever these dastardly acts are committed.

Before I conclude, allow me to share three parting thoughts on Women, Peace and Security, inspired largely from the conclusions of a recent study by UN Women.

First, women should never be used as instruments in any military strategy. Their agency must be respected, and their autonomy and concerns should be a priority.

Second, we must nurture and create an enabling environment for women's leadership and political participation in conflict resolution. It is proven beyond doubt that women's involvement and participation have direct and positive impacts on negotiations and the sustainability of peace processes.

Third, whilst perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence must be punished, justice must be transformative. Domestic legal systems must be strengthened to address impunity.

And as I conclude, as a man and a father of an adorable young woman, allow me share two of my inner sentiments with my fellow men and brothers gathered here today. Often the topic we are addressing today can make us uncomfortable. Sometimes we do not see it as 'men's business'. I beg to differ.

To be a real man involves taking a stance, being pro-active, vocal and speaking out about such violations of our mothers and sisters. To be a real man involves addressing our brothers and sons and correcting them, with the greatest of charity, to help them see the error of their ways. For if we men cannot change, how will society change?

And as a proud African, who adores the good things in our African culture, I find it appalling when sometimes some of us try to hide behind culture to justify sexual and gender-based violence. There is no African culture that I know of that condones the brutalisation its women and girls in the name of culture.

In one of my field trips in this country, as I spoke to women affected by the conflict, I was introduced to a frail old woman, well over 70 years, who had been repeatedly raped. I was totally heart-broken speaking to that woman, and at that moment, all I could think of was my mother. What would I have done if my mother found herself in that terrible situation? How can anybody justify that heinous act in the name of culture?

Distinguished guests,

I cherish the hope that this high-level dialogue will be a milestone event and a concrete step to building more effective preventive and responsive systems to protect women and girls against sexual violence. Sustained implementation of the National Action Plan will be critical, and this will take a lot of hard work, dedication and commitment. I can promise you that your good-faith efforts will be supported by the United Nations.

Let us commit to act upon the messages that we hear today. Let us implement them in our daily lives. Let us be the champions to preserve the God-given rights and dignity of our women and girls, who are our mothers, our wives, our sisters and our daughters.

We can only protect the future of our women and girls if we start now.

Let us get to work!

I thank you.