

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief
Coordinator Mark Lowcock's Remarks on Collective Action to Prevent, Mitigate
and Respond to GBV in Emergencies, Public Launch of the Call to Action on
Protection from GBV in Emergencies 2021-2025 Road Map**

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As delivered

Well, thank you very much indeed, Heba. Hello, everybody.

I am really pleased to be joining you all today for this important discussion, and thank you, Canada, for leading the important work on the Call to Action at a time when COVID is of course making the problems we are concerned about here so much worse.

The Call to Action of the new road map could hardly be more timely, so thank you to everybody who worked so hard on it.

As the Secretary-General has said many times, the pandemic is having devastating social and economic consequences for women and girls especially.

We already know that gender-based violence has increased everywhere since the pandemic began.

We see a surge in family disputes, in intimate partner violence and in child marriage.

We see girls dropping out of school, many of them with little hope of returning – leaving them off course, then at yet greater risk of gender-based violence and early marriage. And leaving them also with dimmer hopes for their economic future.

So, what can be done?

We continue to try to rally support to prioritize gender-based violence, including in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, and also in UN Women's Gender Programme in Humanitarian Action for COVID-19 that I was privileged to help launch in July.

We've scaled up GBV [gender-based violence] services, like community-based protection and hotline services, which in some places have reported a 700 per cent increase in calls.

We try to ensure that sexual and reproductive health services can continue even as health systems in fragile places strain under the weight of COVID-19.

But the truth that we have to acknowledge is that the rhetoric is way ahead of the reality of our collective action, and of the effectiveness of that action. We are not meeting the needs of women and girls in the way we all want.

Because of the pandemic, gender equality, women's rights and even physical safety for many women is more in jeopardy now than in recent years.

One of the problems is that the whole humanitarian system currently is overwhelmed, which is perhaps unsurprising in the midst of the worst international crisis for 50 years.

We have been advocating for more funding for the mitigation, response and prevention of gender-based violence.

We continue to explore ways of directing funding towards local women-led organizations.

Last year, I directed that the fund I manage, the Central Emergency Response Fund, put an increased focus on four priority areas, and one of those is addressing gender-based violence and reproductive health and empowerment for women and girls. So, all the UN's Humanitarian Coordinators now need to demonstrate how they will address these priorities if they want to get funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund. The result is that we are earmarking significantly more money for the things women and girls need and so value.

The CERF [Central Emergency Response Fund], though, needs to do better, and we plan that it will. But the CERF represents less than 5 per cent of all the resources we raise for UN-coordinated responses.

I think there are three things we need to do across the whole of the humanitarian system if we want to make faster progress in changing things for the better.

Firstly, we have to find ways to change programmes for women and girls, especially those tackling violence, from being one of the least well-funded parts of response plans to being among the best funded.

That is not about presenting yet more projects or different analysis. It's about finding ways to help donors actively to prioritize this issue in their actual decision-making on what they are going to fund.

Second, we can't prevent gender-based violence without addressing the root causes.

And I am therefore pleased to see the new road map addressing gender inequality explicitly. I really think we need to be more direct in saying clearly where the problem starts: It starts with men and boys, with the beliefs and values and behaviours that are inculcated in them, and in the systems built up over many centuries whose actual effects are to their advantage and to the disadvantage of women and girls.

Third, we need to strengthen accountability again as Anita [Vandenbeld] has said.

OCHA and UNICEF and others are working on rolling out the GBV Accountability Framework as part of the new Call to Action Road Map.

I was very pleased last year to go to Norway to be involved in organizing the successful Oslo conference on Ending Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Crises. In a few days from now, the organizing countries and organizations, including the United Arab Emirates, Norway, Iraq, Somalia, UNFPA, the International Committee of the Red Cross and my office, are going to report on the progress made since then. What we'll see is we've not made enough progress. So, the time to act is now.

And I am really looking forward to listening to all of your contributions today.

Thank you very much.