Joint Press Release

ACTING TOGETHER TO END SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

24 May Oslo, Norway

- One in three women experience sexual or gender-based violence in her lifetime. Men and boys are affected too. The risk is greatly exacerbated in humanitarian crises triggered by armed conflict and natural disasters.
- In 2019, 140 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Of these, around 35 million are women and girls in reproductive age.
- Despite its criticality, protection from this form of violence remains severely underfunded at less than 1 percent of all funds channelled to humanitarian assistance.
- Today, high-level delegations from 90 countries, top UN officials, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege and many civil society representatives will gather in Oslo to strengthen political commitment and increase funding to end sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises.

Norway is today hosting the first-ever thematic humanitarian conference to combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in humanitarian crises. In a ground breaking collaboration, the governments of Norway, Iraq, Somalia, the United Arab Emirates together with the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, will address the global SGBV challenge. Sexual and gender-based violence is devastating for the people and communities affected, but not inevitable and can be prevented.

"Sexual and gender-based violence takes place across the globe, affecting women, girls, men and boys. People in humanitarian crises are especially vulnerable. Together, we call for increased political and financial support. We need a stronger operational response to a major humanitarian challenge that is too often overlooked, underfunded and met with impunity. This has to stop," said Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, HE Ine Eriksen Soreide.

"As for Norway, we will continue stepping up our efforts. Today, I will underpin our political commitments and I will also pledge 1 billion Norwegian kroner (US$114 million) from 2019 – 2021 to this end. I urge other governments to follow suit."

Sexual and gender-based violence in conflict was once perceived as a bi-product of war, but is now recognised as a weapon and a crime. Still, sexual violence is happening everywhere and is under-reported worldwide due to a number of reasons, including fears of stigma or retaliation, limited availability or accessibility of trusted service providers, impunity for perpetrators, and lack of awareness of the benefits of seeking care.
"All programs and plans that we put in place to achieve higher levels of development to our societies, remain ineffective as long as women are subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, said Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, HE Mohamed Ali Alhakim.

"Great achievements can be brought about when women are empowered and become leading figures in our societies”.

Survivors often face social rejection that increases their vulnerability to further abuse and exploitation. The consequences of this form of violence can be profound, long lasting and inter-generational. Unless addressed, the scars left by sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises, hinder the resilience and recovery of communities.

“The UAE is firmly committed to building on the momentum of this Conference and translating the ideas discussed into action to end sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises,” underscored UAE Minister of State HE Zaki Nusseibeh.

“Tackling sexual and gender-based violence within the wider context of implementing the women, peace and security agenda is central to long-term peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and sustainable development. The UAE will continue to mainstream the protection of women and girls in the entirety of our global humanitarian efforts.”

The Conference comes at a critical moment for Somalia, where the cabinet has recently proposed the Sexual Offences Bill (SOB) to the federal parliament, which would provide its first dedicated legislation on sexual and gender-based violence.

"The passage of this crucial Bill by the cabinet of my country shows our government’s commitment to provide justice for survivors of sexual violence,” said Minister of Women and Human Rights development, HE Deqa Yasin.

During a recent convention of 350 women’s leaders and gender champions from across Somalia and the diaspora (the Somali Women’s Convention), women jointly called for zero tolerance for gender-based violence and the urgent passage of the Sexual Offences Bill.

"We appeal to all stakeholders to stand with Somalia in her efforts to reduce sexual violence, including through the creation and implementation of comprehensive legislation,” Minister Deqa Yasin reiterated.

During his visits to countries caught up in crisis, UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock has seen civilians suffering on an unimaginable scale and gross violations of international law.

"Sexual and gender-based violence is no longer a hidden horror. It is out in the open and there really is no excuse for inaction in the face of this abhorrent phenomenon in humanitarian crises,” said Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock.
"Survivors and people at-risk all over the world need material and tangible support close to where they live. I hope and expect to hear pledges of more funding to grass-roots women’s organizations and others working on the front lines. Many of these and other humanitarian groups are funded through the joint humanitarian and refugee plans, or receive support from pooled funds coordinated by the United Nations."

While the humanitarian response to SGBV has improved in recent years, much remains to be done. It is vital that the prevention and response focuses on the needs of those affected, with their participation

"The international community must do more to support survivors and people at risk of sexual and gender-based violence, and to end the impunity that fuels this global pandemic," said Executive Director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, Dr. Natalia Kanem.

"UNFPA is on the frontlines, coordinating prevention and response efforts and, with our partners, providing life-saving sexual and reproductive healthcare and specialized services to survivors in countries affected by humanitarian crises. Yet with rising needs outpacing current resources, more and longer-term funding, including for women’s organizations, is needed to build a more effective response. We look forward to increased political will and financial pledges to deliver for women and girls and all survivors, to strengthen prevention, and to protect all those at risk."

"Addressing sexual violence is not a humanitarian issue. It is a societal issue that demands urgent effort to address the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence, and this work must be led by States,” said the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Mr. Yves Daccord. "We have to tackle this problem from all sides. The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement stands ready to work with Governments and development actors to ensure that work is aligned”.

A Note to Correspondents is expected in the afternoon on 24 May with a summary of the financial and political commitments made.

Live webcast: https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/sgbv_tv/id2644067/

Media contacts:

- **Norway**: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mari Bangstad, +47 414 40 871, mban@mfa.no
- **Iraq**: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bandar Fawzi, + 964 773 333 7611 (WhatsApp), banderfawzi@yahoo.com & Govar Khudhur Omar, + 47 968 84 904, + 964 750 425 9909 (WhatsApp), govar.omr@gmail.com
- **Somalia**: Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, Ahmed Elmi, +252 617480082 ahmed.elmie@gmail.com
- **United Arab Emirates**: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and international cooperation, Eman Hableel, +97124932980, eman.hableel@mofaic.gov.ae
- **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)**: Anastasia Isyuk, +41 79 251 93 02, aisyuk@icrc.org
- **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**: Jeff Bates, +1 646 750 5354, bates@unfpa.org
- **UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)**: Jens Laerke, +41 79 472 9750, laerke@un.org

Regarding the outcome of the civil society segment on 23 May:

- **Norwegian Church Aid**: Mattias R. Bergset, +47 472 66 706, Mattias.Rolighed.Bergset@nca.no