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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**STATEMENT BY KYUNG-WHA KANG, ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND DEPUTY EMERGENCY RELIEF
COORDINATOR**

**ON BEHALF OF UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN
AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, VALERIE AMOS**

**SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN
ARMED CONFLICT**

New York, 30 January 2015

Checked against delivery

Mr. President,
Distinguished members of the Security Council,

On behalf of Ms. Valerie Amos, USG for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, I have the honour to deliver the following statement.

It has been more than 15 years since the Security Council broke new ground by recognizing the protection of civilians as central to its mandate. Since then, the Council has taken important steps to implement its commitments to protect civilians.

The Council has increasingly identified protection of civilians as a priority task in many of the peacekeeping operations it has created. The Secretary-General has launched the Human Rights Up-Front initiative to reinvigorate system-wide coherence and commitment to preventing and responding to serious human rights violations that could lead to mass atrocities. Humanitarian actors have also strengthened their policies and programmes to protect civilians in crises, as exemplified in the 2013 IASC statement on the centrality of protection.

Despite these positive developments across the UN system, the task of protecting civilians in armed conflict has become more and more onerous over the years, as the scale and level of brutality and violence committed against civilians in armed conflict have continued to rise. From Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, to the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Ukraine and many others, civilians caught up in armed conflict are being killed and maimed, fleeing their homes and fearing for their lives. Now more than ever, the protection of civilians needs to be at the top of our priorities.

Mr. President,

The need for protection has increased dramatically in recent years, mainly as a result of armed conflict. At the start of 2014, humanitarian organizations appealed for aid to help 52 million people in urgent need of assistance and protection. By the end of the year, the number had gone up by almost 50 per cent to 76 million. The overwhelming majority of these people are civilians affected by conflict. And the majority are women and girls.

The number of people displaced by conflict has reached levels not seen since the Second World War. At the end of 2013, there were more than 33 million people living in internal displacement caused by conflict and violence. The majority have been displaced for several years or even decades. The average length of displacement is now 17 years. One of the worst examples of this is Syria, where half of the population has been displaced. 7.6 million people are displaced within the country, many of them multiple times from one unsafe area to the next, in addition to 3.8 million refugees in the neighbouring countries. But the numbers are growing elsewhere, for example in Darfur, where 450,000 people were displaced last year, adding to the more than two million people already in IDP camps.

Another area of serious concern is the widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Figures from 2013 show that when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 93 per cent of the casualties were civilians. The Secretary-General's call to avoid the use of some explosive weapons in populated areas has remained obviously unheeded.

Mr. President,

The Security Council has taken concrete action in a number of cases to implement its commitments to protect civilians in armed conflict, and it has recognized the particular protection needs of women and girls.

In 2010, the Council adopted resolution 1960, which requested the Secretary-General to set up monitoring and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence, and called upon parties to conflict to make clear commitments to combat sexual violence. Resolution 2122 of 2013 put in place stronger measures to enable women to participate in conflict resolution and recovery. In addition, the Council has adopted sanctions, expressly targeting perpetrators of sexual violence in various conflicts around the world. But the scourge of sexual violence in armed conflict is far from being rooted out.

In most conflicts, women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by sexual violence. Indeed the brutalization of women remains a consistent and persistent feature of conflict. As they have captured territory in Iraq and Syria, ISIL has used and punished women to demonstrate their power. Women have been repeatedly raped, forced into marriage and sold into slavery. Nigerian women and girls have given harrowing accounts of their experiences at the hands of Boko Haram. In Afghanistan, the number of women and girls killed or injured has continued to increase at an alarming rate, including targeted attacks against women in public roles and against girls seeking education.

Women and children must also face the increased vulnerability brought about by displacement, family separation, the destruction of civilian infrastructure and restrictions on humanitarian aid. Women and children make up some 80 per cent of refugees around the world and the majority of internally displaced people.

Women and girls who are displaced are particularly at risk of being targeted for all forms of gender-based violence. Harmful practices such as forced and early marriage as well as survival sex are also more common during displacement.

Simply, crisis exacerbates gender inequalities. While entire communities suffer the impact of armed conflict, women and girls are often the first to lose their rights to education, to political participation and to livelihoods, among other rights being bluntly violated.

Mr. President,

These are manifestations of deeper, systemic problems. We need to better understand the social, economic and power dynamics which result in the continued enslavement of and use of violence against women, particularly in conflict situations. We must also make concerted efforts to expand women's representation and participation in rule of law processes and protection mechanisms. Women must be included in the political leadership, security forces and accountability mechanisms in countries.

To facilitate these efforts on the ground, 17 Women Protection Advisers have been deployed to six peacekeeping operations and embedded in the Offices of the SRSGs. In South Sudan, UNMISS regularly consults displaced women in the POC sites through consultation groups which have been formed. These consultations help to ensure that prevention and protection strategies led by the mission take into account the perceptions and security needs of women. Such good practices are being replicated in other mission and non-mission settings.

Mr. President,

The primary responsibility for protecting and assisting civilians affected by armed conflict lies with the parties to the conflict. Yet many parties have demonstrated complete disregard for their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

In some cases, parties to conflict deliberately target civilians and use tactics designed to cause them the greatest harm possible. In Nigeria, Boko Haram has massacred hundreds of civilians and destroyed thousands of homes, schools and medical clinics during the past few weeks. This follows repeated incidents of kidnapping of hundreds of women and children. In Syria and Iraq, all parties have been targeting civilians based on ethnic and religious grounds.

Parties to conflict are also denying people access to basic assistance such as food and medicines. For example, in Syria, the routine removal of medical supplies and equipment from humanitarian convoys has prevented critical medical aid from reaching those who desperately need them. Violence, insecurity and movement restrictions have further hindered access to medical care, including reproductive health care for women and girls. It is estimated that nearly 1,500 women give birth in dire conditions each day in Syria, and that access to obstetric and neo-natal care is virtually non-existent in some ISIL-controlled areas in Iraq, such as Anbar.

Even siege is being used as a tactic of warfare in Syria, where some 212,000 people are in areas that are totally blocked off. They cannot get out and we cannot get the required aid in.

International law is clear: parties to conflict are responsible for meeting the basic needs of persons under their control. Consent for relief operations must never be withheld on arbitrary

grounds. If parties are unable or unwilling to provide adequate assistance, they should allow and facilitate rapid, safe and unimpeded access to people in need, including the immediate free passage of medical supplies. Yet, time and again, we see parties to conflict violating these basic obligations with impunity, with grave consequences for civilians.

Mr. President,

Parties to conflict must be pressed to do more to comply with their legal obligations and ensure accountability whenever such obligations are violated. But the responsibility does not lie solely with the parties themselves. This Council and the international community must take steps to tackle the impunity that continues to fuel many conflicts, as well as the endless flow of weapons and arms. There is nothing that emboldens violators more than knowing that they will not be brought to account for their crimes.

We also need to build up our collective capacity, to find political solutions to conflicts at an early stage, rather than struggling to cope with the consequences. The efforts of humanitarian workers and peacekeepers are no substitute for timely and resolute political action to prevent and resolve conflict. And women must be full participants in the process. On the ground, we need to be more attuned to the specific threats that civilians are facing and the risk of escalation of violence and violations, often manifested through heightened discrimination and repression of minorities, including against women and girls. When we see early warning signs, we must be able to act quickly and effectively. This, Mr. President is at the core of the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative.

Thank you.