Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

People who are subjected to sexual violence in conflict are some of the most vulnerable in the world.

They may already be homeless and destitute, sick and traumatized. Their experiences can affect them physically, mentally and emotionally for the rest of their lives.

Thanks in great part to the bravery of survivors who have spoken out, the world is gradually waking up to the epidemic of conflict-related sexual violence, and the imperative to end it.

The media, civil society, governments and international organizations are finally coming together with calls to action, resolutions, campaigns to end impunity and increase accountability for the perpetrators. We can see the results here today.

But, within the group of those affected, there are people who are even more vulnerable, because they are even more hidden. We know very little about their experiences or how to protect and help them.

Sexual violence against men and boys during conflict is as old as war itself. It continues in conflicts around the world and was documented in some 25 conflicts in the decade from 2000 to 2010. In the past few years alone, there is evidence of these crimes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, during the 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya, in Syria and in Iraq.

Men and boys are not only raped, they are subjected to a host of atrocities, from castration to being forcibly stripped and remaining naked during detention; from torture of the genital area to being forced to commit sex acts on others, including members of
their own families. Men and boys who are forcibly conscripted or detained are particularly vulnerable.

A study by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia found that in one concentration camp near Sarajevo, 4,000 of the 5,000 male prisoners said they had been raped. Research in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo found that one in six of the men surveyed said they had experienced conflict-related sexual violence. And a study in post-conflict Liberia found that among former combatants, 42 per cent of women and 33 per cent of men had experienced sexual violence.

There are huge gaps in research, but we know that all sexual crimes are under-reported and those against men and boys in conflict are particularly difficult to quantify.

Studies are piecemeal and reports are anecdotal. Men who have been sexually violated will often do everything in their power to avoid identification because they face extreme stigma and shame. Survivors who do come forward are often treated as outcasts, ridiculed and driven away from their families and communities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they are sometimes referred to as “bush wives”. In the worst cases, they may have suicidal thoughts, and may act on them.

One way to identify male survivors is when they come forward for medical treatment. But men and boys may seek treatment only if they suffer life-threatening injuries -- and in some cases, not even then. They may be prevented by threats and physical obstacles to accessing care during conflict, or by ideas about dealing with their suffering “like a man”.

In many cases, healthcare providers have no training or experience in dealing with them. Doctors may fail to recognise or may ignore the sexual element of attacks.

The media, governments, inter-governmental organisations and civil society are starting to understand the devastating effects of sexual violence in conflict. But they often focus exclusively on the main group affected: women and girls, seeing men as perpetrators and leaving few resources to help them.

This has to change.

The effects of sexual violence are devastating, for anyone who is subjected to an attack. No group is more or less deserving of help than any other.

The second hidden group affected by sexual violence in conflict is children - both boys and girls. Sexual violence against children is most common when family and social networks have collapsed and when there is a complete breakdown in law and order -- a characteristic of modern warfare, as we see today in the Central African Republic and parts of Syria.

The physical and psychological effects of sexual attacks on children range from long-term trauma, infections like HIV/AIDS, and early pregnancies.

Statistics are difficult to come by, but research in Liberia and Sierra Leone showed that 70 per cent of the people who suffered sexual abuse during conflict were children. They were raped, abducted and abused, both by members of armed groups and by those in positions of authority, including teachers and community leaders. Children who are attacked have nowhere to turn.
Again, survivors suffer deep stigma and trauma that last a lifetime. Girls may find it impossible to find their place in their families and communities, and those who become pregnant may stay with an armed group out of fear of rejection or reprisals at home. They miss out on education and their children are stigmatised and at higher risk of infanticide and abuse.

Boys may be traumatised both by being assaulted, being forced to take part in assaults, or as witnesses to sexual violence. Their trauma often goes unreported and overlooked. Some of these practices are condoned by traditional laws and seen as socially acceptable, for example, the widespread use of Baccha Baazi in Afghanistan -- so-called ‘dancing boys’ who are bought and sold by warlords and used as sexual slaves.

Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

Today we are here, not only to discuss the challenges experienced by hidden victims of sexual violence, but the need for an urgent and comprehensive response.

Yesterday’s experts’ dialogue, including brave and emotive testimony from a survivor, came up with some important new ideas for discussion which I will outline briefly.

It was acknowledged that in conflict settings sexual violence against all members of society including men and boys remains prevalent. In the policy arena, from Governments and the international community there needs to be a sea change in humanitarian response to ensure that all survivors are acknowledged and adequate support mechanisms be provided.

The complexity of changing society attitudes was also acknowledged and that here are needed immediate and longer term strategies at the international, regional, national and community level.

The donor community needs to find additional resources to ensure medical programmes and support mechanisms also include male survivors - and this should not lead to a reduction in programmes currently focusing on female survivors.

It was acknowledged that boys who are victims of sexual violence often then go on to become perpetrators themselves. It is crucial this circle of violence is broken.

In terms of key recommendations:

- First, we must acknowledge all groups suffer from sexual violence and address the factors that contribute to their vulnerability. This means recognising how social and cultural barriers affect levels of risk and access to support. Legislation must be guided by gender analysis and must explicitly prevent and respond to all forms of violence, including violence against children and men.
- Second, we must improve analysis and reporting systems. This means putting resources into research that differentiates between the different groups affected and recognises the challenges and barriers they face. We need to put specific resources into research on children born out of rape and born in captivity. We have to listen to and learn from the people who know most about this: the girls, boys, women and men who have experienced sexual violence in conflict. We need to empower them, their communities and youth and civil society organizations so
that they have a seat at the table and a voice in the discussion. We must break the stigma of reporting these attacks.

- Third, we must address impunity by strengthening global, regional and national legal frameworks, and by investigating and documenting crimes against women, men and children.
- Governments must strengthen access to justice and improve the medical services available to all survivors of sexual violence.
- Perpetrators must be held accountable, regardless of the gender or social status of those they attack. Sexual violence against children and men should be recognised as a crime. Victims should not be treated as criminals themselves.

Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

For its part, the United Nations, and my own organization, OCHA, will continue to take the lead in building partnerships to address the deeper vulnerabilities and inequalities that exacerbate sexual violence in conflicts and emergencies.

OCHA will coordinate, engage and work closely with the other UN agencies and offices, including the Special Representatives to the UN Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and on Children and Armed Conflict, to address sexual violence in conflict.

OCHA will continue to champion a people-centric approach to humanitarian assistance, giving a voice to the most vulnerable groups so that they can share their experiences and determine the priorities for redress.

I personally will advocate with the Security Council to ensure that decision-makers are well informed, and that policy frameworks recognize sexual violence against men and children as a crime.

I look forward to our discussions today and thank you for your commitment.