

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 16 April 2024 from the Permanent Representative of
Malta to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to inform you that, under the presidency of Malta, the Security Council plans to hold an open debate on 23 April 2024 on the theme “Preventing conflict-related sexual violence through demilitarization and gender-responsive arms control” in connection with the item entitled “Women and peace and security”.

In this regard, Malta has prepared a concept note (see annex). I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Vanessa **Frazier**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 16 April 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the theme “Preventing conflict-related sexual violence through demilitarization and gender-responsive arms control”, to be held on 23 April 2024 at 10 a.m.

I. Background

In its resolution 1325 (2000), the Security Council called on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, including rape and other forms of sexual abuse. In its resolution 1820 (2008), the Council resolved to eliminate conflict-related sexual violence¹ and end amnesty and impunity for those crimes. The normative framework of the Security Council for actions in response to sexual violence continued to evolve in resolutions 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2331 (2016) and 2467 (2019).

The annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence provides an opportunity for Member States to reflect on emerging themes associated with the systematic use of sexual violence by State and non-State actors as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism in armed conflicts. This year, the debate on conflict-related sexual violence will focus on preventing such violence through demilitarization and gender-responsive arms control. It will be aimed at identifying opportunities for cross-leveraging arms control and disarmament treaties, instruments and frameworks to more effectively prevent conflict-related sexual violence, and to increase the leadership and influence of women in formulating policy and decision-making in this field.

Drawing on the New Agenda for Peace of the Secretary-General and on Council actions with regard to women and peace and security and to small arms and light weapons, the open debate will be focused on identifying avenues for harmonizing strategies to advance the women and peace and security and disarmament agendas in support of the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence. This focus builds on the analysis reflected in the recent annual reports of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence.

Militarization and arms proliferation increase conflict-related sexual violence

Conflict-related sexual violence is a central concept to consider in the context of the political economy of war, as the proliferation of arms and the illicit trafficking of weapons increase the use of sexual violence by armed groups, and by organized criminal and terrorist groups. Furthermore, such groups may generate revenue through the kidnapping of women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research estimates that between 70 and 90 per cent of conflict-related sexual violence incidents involve weapons and firearms, which are used to intimidate, threaten, coerce, injure and kill civilians, and

¹ The term “conflict-related sexual violence” refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, trafficking in persons when committed in situations of conflict for the purpose of sexual violence or exploitation and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.

to commit sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, abduction, early and forced marriages, and other forms of sexual violence. The proliferation of weapons, including those diverted from legal trade, also enables attacks on human rights defenders and peacebuilders, and negatively affects the security, mobility, education and economic opportunities of women and girls in post-conflict environments.

Preventing the use of conflict-related sexual violence through demilitarization, disarmament and arms controls

Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations recognizes the need to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion of the world's economic and human resources to arms. Similarly, in his New Agenda for Peace, the Secretary-General calls for reduced military spending and actions to reduce the impact of weapons on gender inequality. In his Agenda for Disarmament, the Secretary-General recognizes that the proliferation, diversion and misuse of arms can enable terrorist acts, human rights abuses and gender-based violence.

Robust and effective arms regulation, which is required by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, can strengthen the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. Gender-responsive arms control and disarmament reduce the proliferation of weapons that facilitate conflict-related sexual violence and create a more conducive environment for peacebuilding.

The Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management, adopted in 2023, calls for the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in related policies and practices and for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in these processes. The Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects recommends gender- and age-related assessments and data collection on the impacts of the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, and the use of such data and assessments in corresponding policies and programmes. The Arms Trade Treaty requires States parties to assess the risk of arms exports being used to commit acts of sexual and gender-based violence.

Moreover, the Security Council applies targeted arms embargoes to terrorist groups or networks designated by the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities; and to State or non-State armed groups that are listed as credibly suspected perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence. The Council has included sexual violence as a designation criterion in relevant sanctions regimes.

Furthermore, by aligning national action plans on women and peace and security and on small arms control, and by systematically collecting and sharing data disaggregated by sex and age, Member States can strengthen the gender responsiveness of national arms control policies and legislation.

Ensuring the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women in arms control and disarmament forums

Despite the disproportionate and unique gendered impacts of weapons, women constitute fewer than one third of participants in multilateral disarmament meetings. In its resolution [2122 \(2013\)](#), the Security Council called for the full and meaningful participation of women in arms control at all levels of decision-making and, in its resolution [2242 \(2015\)](#), encouraged their participation in the design and implementation of such efforts. These aims can be advanced by supporting survivors and survivor groups, civil society and women's organizations to leverage arms control

and disarmament measures for the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, including through capacity strengthening and risk mitigation.

Addressing conflict-related sexual violence in peace processes and operations

Conflict-related sexual violence must be considered at the outset of peace processes and mediation efforts, as well as in Security Council mandates authorizing or renewing peace operations and political missions. In its resolutions [1888 \(2009\)](#) and [2467 \(2019\)](#), the Council specified the deployment of gender advisers and women's protection advisers as a critical implementation mechanism for the conflict-related sexual violence mandate.

In its resolutions [1820 \(2008\)](#), [2220 \(2015\)](#) and [2616 \(2021\)](#), the Security Council identified opportunities for cross-leveraging conflict-related sexual violence and arms control efforts in the context of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and post-conflict security arrangements. The Council called for engaging with women and women-led organizations, establishing conflict-related sexual violence protection mechanisms in and around cantonment sites and communities of return, and ensuring that women and girls formerly associated with armed groups could access reintegration resources.

The links between conflict-related sexual violence and weapons can also be addressed in the context of policing, early warning systems, intelligence collection and conflict management.

Addressing the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence

Addressing the gendered root causes of violence and militarization is essential for advancing gender-responsive arms control and disarmament, and for reducing the proliferation of weapons that facilitate conflict-related sexual violence. Weapon ownership and use are closely related to harmful gender norms and attitudes that can exacerbate gender-based discrimination. The prevention of conflict-related sexual violence must therefore reflect both an understanding of the factors shaping the victimization of women and girls, and support for increasing their agency and leadership in disarmament and arms control policies and processes.

II. Guiding questions

- How can the Security Council and regional bodies improve the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence by cross-leveraging disarmament frameworks, and United Nations mechanisms and tools, including in the context of the upcoming Fourth United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects?
- How can the United Nations sustain security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration investments during transitions and mission drawdowns to ensure the protection of civilians from conflict-related sexual violence and to prevent recurrence?
- How can Member States reduce the risk of arms transfers and illicit weapons being used to commit conflict-related sexual violence, including by supporting decision-making by women in disarmament forums?
- How can Member States better harmonize national strategies for implementing the women and peace and security and disarmament agendas to strengthen the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence?

- How can the Security Council improve information-sharing and dissemination of good practices regarding the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and efforts to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons?

III. Format, briefers and participation

The open debate will be chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of Malta, Christopher Fearne. The following speakers will brief the Council:

- Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten
- Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Danai Gurira
- Civil society briefer

Member States wishing to participate in person should inscribe their names on the list of speakers through the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE. A letter addressed to the President of the Security Council, duly signed by the Permanent Representative or the Chargé d'affaires a.i., requesting to participate in accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure must be uploaded to the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE. Inscription for said meeting will open on Thursday, 18 April 2024, at 9.30 a.m.

In order to guarantee the participation of as many delegations as possible, statements should not exceed three minutes.
