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Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity

Prioritizing prevention and strengthening response: women and the responsibility to protect

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report comes as the world faces an unprecedented global crisis arising from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is deepening already existing inequalities, with devastating consequences for women and girls.¹ Such gender inequality is part of underlying structural conditions that provide the foundation for patterns of violence (S/2018/250). While the focus is on responding to the crisis and its consequences, it is important not to lose sight of populations around the world that continue to face other grave dangers, including the risk of falling victim to atrocity crimes. In some cases, those threats are being exacerbated by responses to the pandemic, putting already vulnerable populations at increased risk. Amid rising levels of intolerance and xenophobia and the growing frequency of acts of violence, States must do more to protect their populations and promote a culture of tolerance and respect for human rights. Recent protests in a number of countries, for example, reflect public frustration with systemic racism and discrimination. The time has come for the international community to close the gap between words of commitment and

¹ See also the statement delivered by the Secretary-General on 9 April 2020, available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-04-09/secretary-generals-video-message-women-and-covid-scroll-down-for-french-version.



the real experience of populations in order to prevent atrocity crimes and fulfil the responsibility to protect.

2. At the High-level Plenary Meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly (2005 World Summit), Heads of State and Government unanimously affirmed their responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Member States agreed in the World Summit Outcome document, contained in General Assembly resolution [60/1](#), that such responsibility entailed the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means (para. 138), that they had a collective responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means to help to protect populations from atrocity crimes and that they were prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council and in accordance with the Charter, should peaceful means be inadequate and where national authorities were manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (para. 139). As set forth in its Charter, the United Nations was established in order to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which (...) has brought untold sorrow to mankind” and “reaffirm(s) faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”.

3. The seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations, in which that vital and enduring commitment is enshrined, comes shortly after the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution [63/308](#) on the responsibility to protect and presents an opportunity to reflect on the commitment to fulfil the promises contained therein. This year also marks 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its commitments regarding the achievement of gender equality, 20 years since the adoption of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security and five years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), the Security Council called on Member States to address sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of violence against women and girls as part of the overall goal of ending impunity and prosecuting those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The Council, in resolution [1820 \(2008\)](#), affirmed that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to the crime of genocide” (para. 4). The appointment in 2009 of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict laid further emphasis on the gender aspect of the responsibility to protect. Member States have been urged in resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and subsequent Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security to boost the participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making and to include a gender perspective in conflict prevention and resolution and in reconstruction.

4. The importance of gender equality and the participation of women across the United Nations system has been evident for many years but the link with the responsibility to protect has been more implicit and primarily focused on conflict-related sexual violence. There are obvious areas of complementarity and there is room for renewed engagement between the two agendas, which could help to reinforce inclusive conflict and atrocity prevention, thereby supporting the broader prevention agenda.

5. The purpose of the present report is to outline the links between implementation of the responsibility to protect and the advancement of gender equality and the women and peace and security agenda. That, in turn, will contribute to a better understanding of and response to the gender dynamics of atrocity crimes. The focus is on the

implementation of the responsibility to protect under pillars I and II. The former refers to the responsibility of the State to protect its population and derives from existing international legal obligations of States, which also have a responsibility to build national resilience and to address the root causes of atrocity crimes. The latter refers to the commitment of the international community, including Member States, regional and subregional organizations, civil society and the United Nations, to assist States in meeting those responsibilities. The authors of the report explore how a gender perspective not only can deepen understanding of the causes and dynamics of atrocity crimes but also help States, regional and other actors to better meet their responsibility to protect. In essence, the implementation of the responsibility to protect will be more effective if approached in a more inclusive manner and if priority is given to meaningful participation by women and to their protection and rights at all stages.

II. Gender equality and the responsibility to protect

6. It has been recognized in previous reports on the responsibility to protect that gender inequality and discrimination can increase underlying risks of sexual and gender-based violence. The gender aspect of the responsibility to protect has also been underlined. Reference has been made in those reports to the fact that genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity affect men, women, girls and boys differently ([A/67/929-S/2013/399](#)) and to the role of grassroots women's organizations in providing timely and sensitive early warning information ([A/63/677](#) and [A/73/898-S/2019/463](#)), resolving tensions among communities through intercommunal dialogue ([A/69/981-S/2015/500](#)) and countering hate speech and incitement to violence ([A/67/929-S/2013/399](#) and [A/73/898-S/2019/463](#)). There has also been an emphasis on the inclusion of gender indicators to support early warning ([A/67/929-S/2013/399](#) and [A/73/898-S/2019/463](#)), the importance of implementing gender-responsive justice and security-sector reforms ([A/63/677](#)), the significance of gender-inclusive national prevention strategies ([A/68/947-S/2014/449](#)), and on the full and equal participation of women in decision-making and peace processes, the perspective of women and protection strategies for them in risk assessments and the design of measures to close atrocity prevention gaps ([A/67/929-S/2013/399](#), [A/69/981-S/2015/500](#), [A/71/1016-S/2017/556](#) and [A/72/884-S/2018/525](#)).

7. The prevention of atrocity crimes is a central component of the United Nations human rights framework. In 2020, the Secretary-General stressed in *The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights* that a culture of human rights must permeate all the work of the United Nations and called for a common agenda for protection. Mobilizing all of humanity to prevent atrocities requires that women participate meaningfully in decision-making, that their voices are fully heard and that their abilities are harnessed.

8. The commitment of Member States to the responsibility to protect is first and foremost a commitment to prevent and mitigate the risk of the commission of atrocity crimes. A systematic approach to preventing atrocity crimes requires strong gender-sensitive analysis and indicators, and strategic planning and action based on data disaggregated by sex. Gender-based discrimination and inequality are risk factors for atrocity crimes. It is important, therefore, to mainstream gender in early warning indicators and systems and to recognize the role that women can play in providing information to that end. Gender-sensitive indicators and data disaggregated by sex can also help to identify aggression and militarization in societies, such as the persecution of men who resist pressure to take up arms. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) has pioneered

work on gender-sensitive indicators for a holistic approach to early warning.² The *Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-related Sexual Violence*, published in 2020, includes guidance on early warning and on monitoring and reporting such violence.

9. Measures adopted by regional and subregional organizations to protect women and girls from human rights violations can be instrumental in preventing atrocity crimes. In 2010, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations established the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children. Its aim is to achieve more effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³ In 1994, the Organization of American States adopted the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) and, in 2004, its Follow-Up Mechanism (MESECVI). In 2010, the African Union declared the African Women's Decade with the aim of advancing gender equality and empowering women. In 2014, the African Union and the United Nations established the Framework of Cooperation between the United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the African Union Commission Concerning the Prevention and Response to Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Africa. Five years later, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union decided to dedicate an annual open session to the issue of conflict-related sexual violence on the continent.⁴ In 2011, the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) was adopted by the Council of Europe. The League of Arab States has also made a priority of the protection of women and girls with its Executive Action Plan 2015–2030 on the Protection of Arab Women: Peace and Security, which it adopted in September 2015, and a framework of cooperation on prevention of conflict-related sexual violence in the Arab region. Those regional initiatives all contain elements that relate to the prevention of atrocities. States are encouraged to provide further support to advance the development of gender-sensitive regional frameworks for the prevention of atrocity crimes.

III. The impact of atrocity crimes on women and girls

10. Member States from different regions have underlined the importance of linking the atrocity prevention agenda to other global commitments and priorities, including the women and peace and security agenda. The United Nations has integrated such an approach into many aspects of its work in support of Member States, which themselves need to implement it on an ongoing basis in all regions.

11. The Security Council is paying more attention to the issue of women's peace and security in situations where atrocity crimes are being committed or are imminent. The Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, which was established in 2016, has responded to calls by women's civil society groups to enhance the Council's analysis and understanding of those issues, including with regard to conflict-related sexual violence in specific country situations. The Special Representative regularly shares information with Security Council sanctions committees, including through their monitoring groups and groups of experts, to

² Pablo Castillo Díaz and others, *Gender-Responsive Early Warning: Overview and How-to Guide* (UN-Women, October 2012). See also Department of Political Affairs, *Guidance for Mediators: Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Ceasefire and Peace Agreements* (New York, United Nations, January 2012).

³ See ASEAN, "Progress report on women's rights and gender equality" (2016).

⁴ See <https://archives.au.int/handle/123456789/6489>.

encourage the imposition of targeted sanctions against persons who perpetrate or direct sexual violence against women and girls in conflict. Senior women protection advisers have been deployed to United Nations peace operations in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan (Darfur) to help them to identify and assess threats of conflict-related sexual violence and to advise them on how to address those threats. Thus, where progress has been made in improving international responses to the most serious crises, commitments have often been made providing for implementation of the responsibility to protect and the women and peace and security agenda.

12. The atrocity crimes that fall under the responsibility to protect agenda entail a gender perspective and have a gender impact. Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the definition of crimes against humanity includes acts such as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack (art. 7, para. 1 (g)). The same acts may also constitute war crimes (art. 8, para. 2 (e)(vi)). Neither rape nor sexual violence are explicitly mentioned as constitutive acts in the definition of genocide under article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. However, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1994 (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda) found that rape and sexual violence constitute acts of genocide in so far as they are committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular group targeted as such.⁵ That important finding has contributed to the advancement of justice with respect to crimes of sexual violence committed in conflict. Killing members of a group is just one of four acts that may constitute genocide under the Convention if committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, one of the protected groups targeted as such.⁶ Other acts of genocide, if committed with the same intent, including causing serious bodily or mental harm, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group, are more likely to be directed against women and girls and therefore receive less attention.

13. It is no longer disputed that widespread or systematic sexual violence may constitute atrocity crimes. The Security Council, in its resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#) and [1820 \(2008\)](#), has underscored that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute “war crimes, crimes against humanity or constitutive acts with respect to genocide”⁷ that States, individually and collectively through the international community, have a responsibility to prevent. Sexual violence remains a major threat to women and girls, including women peacebuilders and human rights defenders, in situations of armed conflict and where atrocity crimes are committed or are imminent. In many conflict situations, for example in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, conflict-related sexual violence is employed as a strategy of war. Atrocity crimes have been documented through the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements in United Nations peace operations for conflict-related sexual violence and reported to the Security Council by the Special Representative. Although men and boys are also victims, women and girls are disproportionately affected. In 2019,

⁵ *The Prosecutor v Jean-Paul Akayesu*, Case No. ICTR 96-4-T.

⁶ Security Council resolution [1820 \(2008\)](#) (para. 4) and [A/HRC/32/CRP.2](#) (para. 124).

⁷ [A/63/677](#) (para. 34).

19 situations were reported to the Security Council⁸ in which more than 50 parties to armed conflict were credibly suspected of having committed or instigated patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Such crimes, nonetheless, remain underreported due to stigma, social and cultural barriers and fear of reprisals.

14. Women and girls are especially vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, which constitutes a grave violation of human rights and a serious crime that, under certain circumstances, can constitute an atrocity crime. In its resolution 2331 (2016), the Security Council reiterated that certain crimes committed in the context of human trafficking may constitute war crimes and called on States to take decisive and immediate action to ensure accountability for such actions. The prevention of trafficking of vulnerable people is thus relevant to the responsibility to protect. In 2019, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, reported to the Security Council that women and girls are disproportionately affected by trafficking, especially in conflict and pre- or post-conflict situations. They account for 72 per cent of all victims of human trafficking.⁹ The marginalization of women, their limited access to resources and education, their dependency status and the prevalence of gender-based violence all serve to heighten the risk to women of being trafficked for sex, forced marriage, prostitution or labour.

15. In situations of armed conflict and atrocity crimes, women and girls are also disproportionately affected by displacement, which may constitute a war crime or a crime against humanity under international law. Displaced people typically experience higher mortality rates than non-displaced populations because access to nutrition and medical support is often limited. Displaced women are particularly vulnerable to violent attacks, especially sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation, trafficking and violations of their most basic human rights. Displacement camps and their immediate environs ought to be places of sanctuary, but this is not always assured. Strategies for protecting displaced women and girls, including the provision of life-saving sexual and reproductive health care, have to be integrated fully into atrocity prevention policies and strategies.

16. Combating impunity and ensuring justice and accountability for atrocity crimes are essential to advancing the responsibility to protect agenda. There remain serious gaps in the ability or preparedness of States to hold perpetrators of atrocity crimes against women and girls accountable and, too often, the need for reparations for victims is not met.¹⁰ Member States must also do more to end impunity for serious crimes committed against women and girls, including by ensuring that all incidents of sexual violence are fully investigated, prosecuted and tried in a competent court and in accordance with international standards; amending or adopting national legislation to incorporate international crimes; ratifying and implementing the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Rome Statute; and supporting international, regional, and hybrid courts. The location, arrest and prosecution of individuals at all levels accused of committing or inciting atrocity crimes, in particular against women and girls, has to be a common priority. To guarantee non-recurrence, legal frameworks that incorporate the full range of gender-based crimes of violence should be advanced through mechanisms of transitional justice and the fostering of a culture of respect for women's human rights.¹¹ Member States unable to address those priorities are encouraged to request technical assistance made available by United Nations entities, including the Team of Experts on the rule of law and sexual violence in conflict.

⁸ S/2019/280.

⁹ See www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25278&LangID=E.

¹⁰ S/2019/280.

¹¹ S/2019/800 (para. 65).

17. Atrocity crimes can also be committed in non-armed conflict contexts, and gender-based violence may be an indicator of the risk of atrocity crimes. Consistent patterns of gender-based discrimination can be further exacerbated when women suffer discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, race, indigenous heritage, religion or disability.¹² There is a need to reverse such trends and to redouble efforts to end inequality and discrimination along gender-based lines.

18. Atrocity crimes leave lasting physical and psychological scars on individuals and societies, often for decades. Survivors all too often confront environments with inadequate medical infrastructure and little, if any, mental health support. Medical and psychosocial services, access to justice or reparations, livelihood support or any other type of intervention should be governed by a victim-centred approach. In addition, the conceptualization of strategies that address not only the direct needs of survivors but also the root causes of the violence and discrimination against women are key to sustained change. Redress and reparations for survivors of atrocity crimes are often lacking and long-term interventions and support are sometimes left to civil society groups, many of them led by women, and volunteers. One example is the women's health organization, Medica Zenica, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It provides comprehensive psychosocial, medical and material support to thousands of women and children survivors of the war that took place in that country between 1992 and 1995. Long-term planning and the involvement of State authorities and donors will be crucial to reaching as many survivors as possible.

19. In the 2005 World Outcome Summit document, Member States recognized that protecting their populations from atrocity crimes also entails the prevention of such crimes and incitement to commit them. Hate speech that may constitute an element of incitement to violence is a significant indicator of risk of atrocity crimes. That includes hate speech targeting women and gendered or hyper-masculine hate speech. In response to growing concerns about the spread of hate speech globally, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide has led development of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. The Strategy, which is being implemented at the global and country levels, also includes reference to the need for the United Nations to engage with new and traditional media as instruments for addressing hate speech, recognizing that public spaces now include social media and that they have been used to spread misogynistic hate speech and to discriminate against and attack women and girls. The role of local mechanisms, including women's groups and religious leaders, in resolving tensions among communities and countering hate speech and preventing incitement to violence should not be underestimated. They require national and international support.

20. Women are often documented as victims of atrocity crimes. It is, however, equally important to better understand situations where women have actively facilitated or perpetrated such crimes. Studies have shown that, although most perpetrators are men, many more women than so far assumed are involved in committing atrocity crimes.¹³ Viewing perpetrators as exclusively male can lead to simplistic explanations based on traditional gender stereotypes. Women may be involved directly in committing atrocity crimes as combatants or indirectly, for example by providing male perpetrators practical or emotional support or by promoting certain ideas and types of discrimination that form the basis for committing

¹² See general recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (para. 12); [A/HRC/26/38](#) (para. 58); [S/2019/280](#) (para. 2).

¹³ Alette Smeulers, "Female perpetrators: ordinary and extraordinary women?", *International Criminal Law Review*, vol. 15, No. 2 (January 2015).

such crimes.¹⁴ That has implications for accountability. To date, only two women have been convicted by international criminal tribunals, obscuring the multiple roles that women have played in carrying out atrocities in different parts of the world.¹⁵ It is important to examine the different roles women play in enabling atrocity crimes and how that can be reflected in prevention strategies relating to the responsibility to protect.

IV. Vital role of women in prevention and protection

21. Strengthening holistic atrocity prevention will only be possible if women participate equally and meaningfully in decision-making, conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, protection, transitional justice, reconciliation and peacebuilding and other political processes. It is important to recognize and support the role that women already play and to identify the entrenched obstacles they continue to face. Civil society organizations do invaluable work in that regard.

22. Efforts to prevent atrocities must fully reflect the standards, priorities and outcomes set out in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and all subsequent related resolutions, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, and as included in the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). Despite their underrepresentation, women in many parts of the world are displaying immense leadership in that regard. More needs to be done to support that work. Women must be fully and equally represented in all aspects of atrocity prevention (see the points set out below). Cross-cutting partnerships are needed with regard to Goals 5 and 16, the women and peace and security agenda and action to prevent violent extremism in order for the responsibility to protect to be fulfilled.

A. Early warning

23. Local actors, particularly women, play a key role in atrocity prevention through information sharing and early warning. Civil society organizations and women's rights activists monitor and document violations that amount to or could give rise to atrocity crimes, facilitate legal redress and support survivors. In Timor-Leste, for example, the non-governmental organization Belun has pioneered an early warning and response network to alert people to the risk of violence against women and provide remedies. Over the past two years, the network has been extended to more remote parts of Timor-Leste. In coming years, variations of the system will be established in other countries and connected to broader atrocity early warning frameworks.

24. The frequency of attacks against women human rights defenders continues to rise. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders noted in his 2019 report that women often face additional and different risks and obstacles that are gendered, intersectional and shaped by entrenched gender stereotypes. They

¹⁴ Eli Stannes, "The responsibility to protect: integrating gender perspectives into policies and practices", *Global Responsibility to Protect*, vol. 4, No. 2 (January 2012).

¹⁵ In 2011, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko was convicted of conspiracy to commit genocide, extermination, rape, persecution, violence to life in the form of murder and other inhumane acts by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. In 2003, Biljana Plavšić was convicted of persecution as a crime against humanity by the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991 (International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia).

confront physical assaults, denial of medical treatment, degrading searches, threats to their families and communities, defamation, public media attacks against their physical appearance, arbitrary detention, sexual and gender-based violence and murder. They are also at risk of being rejected and stigmatized by their communities and revictimized if they report acts of violence.¹⁶ Women's human rights defenders are on the front line of atrocity prevention and more has to be done to protect them.

B. Security sector

25. More gender-balanced police, military and judicial sectors can help to improve civilian protection and boost respect for the rule of law. Increasing the number of women represented in the security sector at all levels, including in civilian oversight bodies, can make an important contribution to atrocity prevention. Employing women on the front line of service delivery (as police officers, corrections officials, legal representatives and court administrators) and at the highest levels of policy influence (as legislators, judges and in professional oversight bodies) can lead to more gender-responsive justice systems.¹⁷ The presence of female police officers correlates with increased reporting of sexual violence.¹⁸ In eastern Chad, where refugees, internally displaced persons and local people face hijacking, sexual and gender-based violence and attacks by armed groups, female police officers in civilian dress were deployed. They have proven better able to communicate with women and enhanced the level of gender-sensitive protection.¹⁹ Member States can assist peers with capacity-building. In the Central African Republic, the United Nations has trained the Joint Rapid Response and Prevention Unit for Sexual Violence against Women and Children to investigate crimes of sexual violence even in remote areas. In that country's capital, Bangui, a police station provides medical and psychosocial support to survivors of sexual violence.

C. Conflict resolution and peace processes

26. Peace processes in which women take part as equal partners tend to lead to more sustainable peace outcomes and more inclusive peace agreements that reflect the concerns and interests of all of society.²⁰ Global data show that the involvement of women in conflict prevention is essential for achieving lasting, just and sustainable peace by broadening political dialogues and enabling their voices to be heard and their priorities to be taken into account. The participation of women increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20 per cent. Agreements with the participation of women are 35 per cent more likely to last 15 years.²¹ The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs has worked systematically to overcome obstacles to the meaningful participation by women in United Nations mediation efforts, for example by ensuring the full involvement of women civil

¹⁶ [A/HRC/40/60](#).

¹⁷ UN-Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, p. 121 (2015);

UN-Women, *Improving Women's Access to Justice During and After Conflict: Mapping UN Rule of Law Engagement*, p. 40 (2016).

¹⁸ UN-Women, *Preventing Conflict*; Laura Turquet and others, *Progress of the World's Women: In Pursuit of Justice 2011–2012*, pp. 59–61 (UN-Women, 2011).

¹⁹ John Karlsrud and Randi Sohljell, "Gender sensitive protection and the responsibility to protect: lessons from Chad", in Sara E. Davies and others, eds., *Responsibility to Protect and Women, Peace and Security*, pp. 109–110 (The Hague, Brill Nijhoff, 2013).

²⁰ UN-Women, *Preventing Conflict*, p. 41.

²¹ UN-Women, *Preventing Conflict*; Laurel Stone, "Quantitative analysis of women's participation in peace processes", annex II in *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes*.

society leaders and organizations in peace processes at all levels, from local conflict prevention efforts to formal peace negotiations.

27. Examples abound of the pivotal role played by women and women's organizations in supporting peace processes and mediating disputes that have led to the carrying out of atrocities or have the potential to do so. Regular consultations with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and ongoing advocacy by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria helped to ensure that women, including members of the Board, achieved 28 per cent representation on the Constitutional Committee for the Syrian Arab Republic. Since 2016, the Board has been the main women's mechanism advising the United Nations on issues in that country, making recommendations with regard to mediation, raising matters missing from the agenda and developing policy positions with a gender perspective. It also advocates inside the country to work across political lines and find consensus on issues ranging from aid delivery to the release of detainees. In Somalia, Asha Haji Elmi,²² in her tireless pursuit of peace, has not only promoted the inclusion of women in the peace process but also addressed the abuse of women's human rights. The South Sudan Women Coalition for Peace and Development, which comprises South Sudanese women's organizations, has played a significant role in advocating the participation of women in the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, which resulted in 25 women delegates taking part in the signing of the Agreement in September 2018 and the appointment of a woman as one of the Vice-Presidents in February 2020. In Colombia, by 2015, one fifth of the members of the negotiating delegations for the Government and the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) were women. One of the main results of that substantial degree of participation was the broadening of the negotiation agenda, with women using their seats at the table to address some of the primary grievances of affected communities, including land restitution and the right to justice and reparations for victims. They also successfully included provisions in the Final Peace Agreement on the rights of women, girls and indigenous populations, seeking to secure equal access to rural property for women, promote women's political participation, create measures to prevent gender-based violence and reject amnesty for crimes of sexual violence committed during the conflict. As a result, of the 578 provisions in the Agreement, 130 concern gender issues and are focused on prioritizing the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, their participation in the implementation of the Agreement and addressing structural discrimination and the disproportionate impact of conflict on those segments of the population. In 2018, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq supported the establishment of a women's advisory group to promote the meaningful representation of women in leadership, decision-making and peacebuilding. The group has proposed to the parliamentary committee working on constitutional review the inclusion in the Constitution of an article guaranteeing women's representation at all levels of governance and independent institutions, not just in the Council of Representatives, through a quota system.

28. As noted in a report by the Secretary-General, all United Nations mediation teams include women but the participation of women in negotiating delegations needs to be enhanced.²³ In response to that report and Security Council resolution [2493 \(2019\)](#), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs has begun planning and holding context-specific, high-level strategy meetings to design and support inclusive and comprehensive peace processes. The first such meeting, held in April 2020 with the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, resulted in an action plan for increasing the meaningful participation of women and gender-

²² Asha Haji Elmi is a Somali politician, peace activist and founder of Save Somali Women and Children. In 2008, she received the Right Livelihood Award for her work.

²³ [S/2019/800](#), para. 14.

responsive peacemaking in Yemen. The growing number of women mediator networks, including the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks, Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa), Arab Women Mediators Network, Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, Nordic Women Mediators, Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth and ASEAN Women for Peace Registry, provides an opportunity to strengthen a multitrack approach and should be supported by Member States and regional organizations.

D. Peace operations

29. Whether conducted by the United Nations or by regional arrangements, peace operations play a significant role in protecting populations from atrocity crimes. The Department of Peace Operations manages seven such operations with a specific mandate for the protection of civilians; most of them also have other related protection mandates, including with regard to human rights, conflict-related sexual violence and child protection. The participation of women in the uniformed component of peacekeeping contributes significantly to the success of such missions. In addition to bringing added skills to mission personnel, women peacekeepers boost the missions' credibility and trust among the local population. Through targeted outreach to women in host communities, missions benefit from their knowledge of local protection strategies and their ability to provide early warning.²⁴ In a number of situations, women's protection networks work closely with peacekeeping missions by providing information, helping to determine where missions send patrols and ensuring that vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons, have information on how to obtain access to protection services. In the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, the all-women Kenyan contingent in Bentiu provided enhanced physical protection to women when they went to collect firewood or fetch water, significantly reducing the number of attacks, including rape and gang rape. That trend was reversed when Kenya withdrew its peacekeepers in 2016. Despite the encouraging progress and the significant contributions made by women in peace operations to meeting the responsibility to protect, they remain a distinct minority in United Nations peace operations. Troop and police-contributing countries should continue to work with the United Nations to increase the overall number of women in their contingents.

E. Peacebuilding and sustaining peace

30. The systematic inclusion and participation of women and the promotion of gender equality are central to maintaining peace and sustainable development. Although they have often been excluded from peace and political processes and faced gender-specific threats and violence, women have come together to act as agents of change, arbitrators, mediators, counsellors and peacebuilders. They have achieved much in building peace at the local and national levels. Their participation in those processes, including those led by the Peacebuilding Commission, is critical to ensuring inclusive, sustainable peace, reversing gender inequalities and addressing the specific needs and concerns of women. In Liberia, for example, women were at the forefront of efforts to end the civil war. Since then, they have remained mobilized in community-led peacebuilding structures that catch early signs of conflict and resolve them before they can take on a bigger dimension. They remain engaged with companies and Governments on issues relating to the root causes of conflict, such as natural resource management, and policymaking. In Cameroon, women and young people are working to build community dialogue, reduce tensions and strengthen

²⁴ UN-Women, *Preventing Conflict*, p. 141.

social cohesion. In Ethiopia, women peacebuilders are using community dialogue platforms to address issues of displacement between host communities and returnees. In the Solomon Islands, women's and youth caucuses serve as inclusive forums through which to address peacebuilding challenges. They have encouraged a greater commitment on the part of the Government to mainstream a gender perspective across the public sector. In Kyrgyzstan, women religious leaders and local governments in 16 communities are working together to boost local resilience to violent extremism. They have led a media campaign breaking down stereotypes about religious and ethnic groups and improved the relationship between local government and communities at risk of radicalization. In Burundi, the Women Network for Peace and Dialogue, which was established in 2015 with the support of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund to address local conflicts and contribute to a peaceful environment, now extends from the local to the national levels and has more than 14,000 active members. They have held more than 12,000 dialogue sessions and addressed some 5,000 local disputes. In all those cases, women are stopping violence, promoting peace and preventing conflict and atrocity crimes.

F. Justice and accountability

31. Ensuring accountability and redress for past and present atrocity crimes, including through transitional justice mechanisms and processes, is crucial to their non-recurrence and the prevention of violent conflict.²⁵ Under the Rome Statute, a range of gender-based crimes were codified as crimes against humanity and war crimes (see paragraph 12 above), building on the statutes and jurisprudence of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. That was to a large extent the result of advocacy led by the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice, a coalition that came into existence specifically to ensure that the Rome Statute reflected gender issues. The participation of women in the process of bringing justice to bear for the most serious crimes under international law has been important not only for the promotion of gender equality and women's participation in decision-making, but also because women's perspectives on justice issues have thus been taken into account. The involvement of women in accountability processes has also helped to challenge stereotypes and highlight the criminal nature of acts of sexual violence against women in contexts of armed conflict. In the case against Jean-Paul Akayesu, the former mayor of Taba, Rwanda, before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Justice Navanethem Pillay took the lead in questioning a witness concerning allegations of rape. That ultimately led to the Tribunal's ground-breaking decision that rape and sexual violence can constitute genocide if committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, one of the protected groups, as such. The case created crucial jurisprudence for other international jurisdictions and challenged the misconception of rape and other forms of sexual violence as inevitable by-products, or even spoils, of war. In Kosovo,²⁶ of 1,176 applications received by the Government Commission on the Recognition and Verification of the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence During the War in Kosovo, 657 persons have been recognized as victims of such violence and received reparations. For many women, that has been transformative in terms of empowering survivors and acknowledging their past suffering. In Guatemala, survivors of conflict-related sexual and domestic slavery violence are working with the United Nations,

²⁵ [A/HRC/37/65](#).

²⁶ All references to Kosovo in the present report, whether to the territory, institutions or population, are to be construed in the context of Security Council resolution [1244 \(1999\)](#) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

State institutions and their communities to implement the sentence resulting from the Sepur Zarco case, which inspired the adoption of reparation measures in the country.²⁷

32. There continues to be a gender imbalance in international courts and tribunals. Of the 20 judges at the International Criminal Court, six are women, while at the International Court of Justice, of the 15 judges, three are women. At the European Court of Human Rights, 16 of the 47 judges are women, while the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has one female judge out of six. At the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, six of the 11 judges are female. Gender representation and women's perspectives in international courts and tribunals are essential for legitimacy and representativeness. Many such positions are filled through nominations by Member States, followed by elections. States, therefore, are ultimately responsible not only for nominating more female candidates but also for ensuring that the status of women in the legal profession is addressed.

V. Conclusions

33. With the present report, we pay tribute to the many courageous and remarkable women throughout history and in modern times, some documented and many who never will be, who have overcome violence and war to protect their fellow human beings and whole communities from genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing. It also provides all Member States in the General Assembly with an opportunity to strengthen gender equality as part of upstream atrocity prevention and to promote women's participation as a key part of fulfilling their responsibility to protect populations against atrocity crimes.

34. Around the world and across many sectors, women have demonstrated the determination and skills needed to make a difference. However, they face obstacles at every step. Women are still underrepresented and underestimated in government decision-making and in the rule of law and security sectors; they continue to face social pressure, stigmatization, abuse and exploitation. For those reasons, we have yet to come close to effectively taking holistic action for atrocity prevention. Let us mobilize to eradicate discrimination and pursue equality, ensure gender responsiveness in the responsibility to protect agenda and do more to support women as agents of prevention and protection. The Secretary-General is committed to advancing those priorities within the United Nations and calls on Member States and regional and subregional organizations to join the effort and implement the following recommendations:

(a) Recommit to prevent and respond to genocide and other serious crimes under international law and reaffirm paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, including by addressing gender aspects of protection as part of the responsibility to protect;

(b) Strengthen gender-based atrocity prevention by enhancing cross-cutting partnerships, including on the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 5 and 16, and the women and peace and security agenda;

(c) Fully utilize the responsibility to protect focal points and women and peace and security networks to mainstream gender-based atrocity prevention in national and regional policies. Specifically, national focal points can ensure a link between gender policies and the responsibility to protect principle;

²⁷ Data from the reports of the Commission. See also Henri Myrtilinen and Nicola Popovic, *We Were Like Caged Birds, This Gave Us Wings to Fly: A Review of UN-Women Programming on Gender-Sensitive Transitional Justice* (New York, UN-Women, 2019).

(d) Do more to end impunity, including for sexual and gender-based crimes, by ratifying and implementing the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Rome Statute, by amending national legislation, when required, to include atrocity crimes, by improving access to justice, especially for women and girls, and by supporting regional and international accountability mechanisms for atrocity crimes;

(e) Develop and include gender-specific indicators in national and regional early warning frameworks in order to improve capacity to monitor situations and detect and respond to early patterns of crimes, including sexual and gender-based crimes. To that end, strengthen support for women's organizations to provide timely and actionable information on evolving situations of concern;

(f) Promote and facilitate conducive environments for civil society organizations to advance protection and prevention efforts, including in support of gender equality and women's equal participation and leadership in atrocity prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding processes;

(g) Implement measures to address and counter gendered hate speech and prevent incitement to violence at the local, national, regional and global levels, in line with the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.
