

Opening Statement

Honorable Ministers, government representatives, NGO, civil society and UN partners, welcome to this panel discussion on Gender Based Violence in Conflict and post conflict, as part of the Africa Preparatory meeting to the World Congress on Sexual Exploitation.

As we are all aware, sexual exploitation and abuse are forms of Gender Based Violence, which is an umbrella term that covers many forms of abuse of children and women including early marriage, and FGM, as well as sexual violence. Tackling the broader problem of GBV; which lies in power and gender inequities, will thus support our efforts in the struggle against sexual exploitation and abuse. Although GBV and SEA are prevalent in all countries, and in all stages of development, they are particularly acute in times of war and humanitarian crises. The links between GBV and the heightened risk and threat of HIV and AIDS should also not be neglected.

In our session today we hope to provoke discussion to invigorate the Gender Based Violence agenda; to learn about how new policies, legal instruments, tools and resources can support our efforts, and to learn from each other about a range of different experiences in addressing GBV in Africa. The panel will offer an overview of global, regional, and country specific examples of current work on GBV, we look forward to your contributions and questions in discussion to further this dialogue.

Gender Based Violence in war is not a new subject, we have all heard the horrific statistics before, from DRC and Rwanda, from Sierra Leone and Liberia, and from Darfur. While it is true that this topic is perhaps not new, it is an issue that continues to haunt us in our efforts to achieve greater equality of opportunity for women and men, and boys and girls, and in achieving the Millenium Development Goals. Our efforts in striving towards human rights for all will continue to be thwarted, until we can see greater progress in eliminating Gender Based Violence, in conflict, in recovery and post conflict transition, and in our shift towards sustainable development.

While we are accustomed to hearing about the scale of sexual violence in armed conflict, relatively smaller pockets of civil unrest, and post election crises, have also put women and children at increased risk of sexual violence in recent years in Africa. During the past year Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia have all experienced violence and internal displacement, and witnessed reports of sexual violence against children and women within humanitarian response efforts.

The good news, and there is some good news in this dismal report, is that our efforts to provide humanitarian relief have created space and opportunity to address long standing protection problems, including the reality of Gender Based Violence.

In Kenya, a wide range of partners in Gender Based Violence prevention and response were able to come together in strengthened coordination and cooperation efforts in the wake of the December 2007 crises, and continue to function effectively as a group as the country moves into recovery and reintegration..

This was a positive experience, and much of this success in Kenya can be attributed to the numerous partners who have been developing the right tools and resources for GBV prevention and response during recent years, and thus had an appropriate arsenal of weapons ready to confront Gender Based Violence in the context of violence in Kenya. The good news for children is that tools and procedures were very specifically adapted to meet the needs of children.

At the Global level the good news is that we do have the attention of the world, as evidenced through the UN Secretary General's launch of his campaign on Violence Against Women and Girls this year, and the passing of the most recent Security Council Resolution 1820. We must ensure that all of us are involved in the UNSG's campaign efforts, particularly to highlight the plight of girls and adolescents, greater advocacy is a pillar of the campaign.

In Africa, the African Union is our strategic partner in raising awareness around Gender Based Violence, as noted most importantly in two recent colloquiums on Gender Justice, hosted by the governments of South Africa and Ethiopia. Both of these colloquiums brought together all African government partners and were encouraged by the launch of the UN studies on violence against women and children.

This year, the AU and the ECA will host the African Development Forum with an emphasis on Gender Equality and Ending Violence Against Women.

In addition, other regional instruments to address GBV are being put in place including The International Conference on the Great Lakes *protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children*.

The protocol was developed in consultation with the eleven member states who are part of the IC GLR and who signed the Pact on Peace and Security for the GLR in December 2006.

Most recently advocacy and awareness on the protocol was created through a high level consultation held in Goma in June 2008.

Although the eleven member states have significantly endorsed the protocol as an important instrument of the Pact, much more needs to be done at the community level to ensure girls and women and communities are better protected, and that national government legislation is harmonized with this protocol.

Humanitarian reform and the establishment of the cluster approach, for more predictable and coordinated response efforts, has provided strategic guidance for GBV. The IASC Protection Cluster and the GBV sub cluster within this have proven instrumental in guiding the many partners and range of tactics that are the multi sectoral and cross cutting reality of GBV work.

The GBV sub cluster has been most effective in Uganda, where a GBV strategy was developed for the conflict affected area of northern Uganda that emphasized the need to build the capacity of national governments to ensure effective transition in post crisis recovery and reintegration.

The establishment of the GBV sub cluster in Kenya was an effective mechanism to increased advocacy and awareness raising of the pre existing crisis of sexual violence.

Even where Protection clusters or sub clusters have not been formally established, protection and GBV working groups are being formed based on the guidance of the humanitarian reform agenda. This was for example the case in South Africa recently. The displacement of thousands of migrant populations in a number of areas of South Africa as a result of attacks on foreigners in May 2008, led to the establishment of IDP camps in a number of locations. UNICEF led interagency GBV field assessments in the camps, and found that insecurity, GBV, and the fear of rape were widespread. In one camp it was reported that *“women are afraid to report cases of sexual violence because they are afraid of being deported”*. Women and girls who had come to RSA from other war torn regions of the continent, including DRC noted *“We fled war and rape to come here, we can’t go home, we came here and have been humiliated all over again as women”*.

Finally today I want to introduce the **Regional Strategic Framework for the Prevention of and Response to Gender-Based Violence in East and Southern Africa**. The framework has been disseminated to date in 10 countries, including both conflict and non conflict affected areas, through national meetings attended by government, UN, and civil society partners to ensure the greatest degree of national stakeholder involvement, and adaptation to local conditions.

Best-practices in the framework involve a multi-sectoral approach to addressing gender-based violence, within and across health, security, legal-justice, and psychosocial sectors and tackled at three levels: legislation and policy reform; capacity building of multi-sectoral systems; and provision of compassionate, survivor-centered services. Community mobilization, the promotion of full human rights, and the engagement of men and boys in the reduction of violence are reflected as critical cross-cutting features of efforts to combat GBV.

We hope that the opportunity of this panel has provided an opportunity to increase our awareness of existing GBV problems that face the countries and communities where we are working, and challenge all of us in our plans and activities for combating GBV in future endeavors.