Addressing sexual violence is life-saving, not optional

What: UK Foreign Secretary William Hague to host The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, aimed at galvanizing international action against sexual violence as a weapon of war.

When: 10-13 June 2014

Who: UNICEF global and conflict-country child protection experts are available for interview prior to and throughout the summit:
- Susan Bissell, UNICEF Director of Child Protection
- Barbara Bentein, UNICEF Democratic Republic of Congo Representative
- Sikander Khan, UNICEF Somalia Representative
- Jonathan Veitch, UNICEF South Sudan Representative
- Sheema Sen Gupta, UNICEF Somalia Child Protection Chief
- Fatuma Ibrahim, UNICEF South Sudan Child Protection Chief
- Mendy Marsh, UNICEF Gender-based Violence in Emergencies Specialist
- Erin Patrick, UNICEF Gender-based Violence in Emergencies Consultant

Where: London, United Kingdom

Why: In many war zones worldwide, sexual violence is as devastating to children’s and women’s lives as bullets and bombs, putting hundreds of millions of children and women at increased risk of rape and abuse. The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict has the opportunity to focus on prevention, push for care and support for survivors, and to help end the culture of impunity surrounding such crimes by galvanising international action.

“Sexual violence is the weapon of war that ceases to die. It is a global tragedy that destroys the lives of the women, girls and boys who are raped and abused. Sexual violence during conflict also engrains itself into society, so that when war is over it continues alone, causing unbearable suffering. Programmes that prevent sexual violence are life-saving. This has to be recognized. To have results though they have to be implemented within the whole response package as soon as conflict hits.” said Susan Bissell, UNICEF’s Director of Child Protection.

Sexual Violence in Conflict: The Statistics

- More than 150 million young girls and 73 million boys experience sexual violence every year. Children in conflicted-affected countries are the most vulnerable.
- In the most recent conflict in South Sudan, rape has been used by both sides of the conflict during fighting.
- Around 40% of Congolese women are believed to have been subjected to some form of sexual violence at some point in their lives.
- A survey of rape survivors in South Kivu region, DRC revealed that 91% suffered from one or several rape-related illnesses including tissue tears in the vagina, bladder and rectum.
- In post-conflict Liberia UNICEF estimates that a staggering 87% of children have experienced some form of sexual violence and 65% of rape survivors are under 15 years old.
Recent estimates in Kenya – where local conflicts are frequent - show that approximately one in three women and one in five men experienced sexual violence in their childhood.\textsuperscript{vii}

In Cote d'Ivoire, one in ten women (9.9\%) reported that they were forced to have sex by a non-partner since the age of 15, more than one in eight (14.8\%) reported their first sexual experience was forced.\textsuperscript{viii}

During 2013 in Somalia, up to 35\% of survivors of rape receiving services are girls under 12.\textsuperscript{ix}

In 2003, 74\% of a sample of 388 Liberian refugee women living in camps in Sierra Leone reported being sexually abused prior to being displaced. During displacement, 55\% experienced sexual violence.\textsuperscript{x}

During the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 women survived rape.\textsuperscript{xi}

In the early 1990s, an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.\textsuperscript{xii}

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**About UNICEF**

UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

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For more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact:

Georgina Thompson, UNICEF New York, Tel: +1 212 326 4576, Mobile: +1 917 775 3874, gthompson@unicef.org

Rose Foley, UK National Committee for UNICEF, Tel: +44 20 7375 6077, Mobile: + 44 7964 296 431 rosef@unicef.org.uk

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\textsuperscript{i} Livesaving, Not Optional (2013), International Rescue Committee. [http://www.rescue-uk.org/sites/default/files/Lifesaving%20not%20Optional%20Protecting%20women%20and%20girls%20from%20violence%20in%20emergencies%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.rescue-uk.org/sites/default/files/Lifesaving%20not%20Optional%20Protecting%20women%20and%20girls%20from%20violence%20in%20emergencies%20FINAL.pdf)

\textsuperscript{ii} When a woman or girl has been raped, she has just three days to access care to prevent the potential transmission of HIV, five days to prevent unwanted pregnancy, and sometimes just a few hours to ensure that life-threatening injuries do not become fatal. These essential medical services often do not exist in emergency settings, and even when they do, the path for a survivor to reach them is blocked with the hurdles of stigma, shame, fear and real threats to her security. In addition to medical services, other interventions such as locks on latrines and community security patrols along paths to school and water sources can save lives by preventing sexual assault in the first place; yet these interventions are often not prioritized.


\textsuperscript{iv} UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), “Conflict in South Sudan: A Human Rights Report” 8 May 2014, p.2; 49-50


\textsuperscript{vii} UNICEF; Liberia, 2014.


\textsuperscript{ix} Men’s and women’s experiences of violence and traumatic events in rural Cote d’Ivoire before, during and after a period of armed conflicted, BMJ Open 2014
UNICEF Somalia


Survey on Violence Against women in Rwanda, Association of Widows of the Genocide (Ageva), Kigali, 1999