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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

23 April 2019

Sexual Violence in Conflict

**Statement by HE Gillian Bird
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the
United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

Madam/Mister President,

Let me begin by joining others in expressing Australia's deep shock and sadness at the horrific terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka. We extend our deepest condolences and stand with Sri Lanka as it continues to come to terms with this senseless and barbaric attack.

In order to eradicate sexual violence in conflict we need to address all four pillars of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, not just protection. This is not simply an issue of protection. These are issues of prevention and accountability.

Protection starts with prevention.

Sexual violence in conflict is part of a continuum of violence, primarily against women and girls, which is rooted in gender inequality. Research clearly shows that gender inequality, including violence against women in peacetime, is a direct cause of sexual violence in conflict. Indeed, gender inequality is the strongest indicator of a country's risk of conflict.

While this debate naturally focuses on violence during conflict, we must not forget the fundamental route to prevention relies in addressing the fundamental cause: gender inequality in all its forms.

Sexual violence is not an inevitable occurrence in the ordinary course of conflict. It is not something we should ever accept. Australia is outraged by the persistent and widespread occurrence of sexual violence in armed conflict. A climate of impunity discourages reporting, undermines assistance, and abets further violations.

We acknowledge the central importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all people in conflict situations, but particularly survivors of rape and sexual violence. Access to the full range of quality reproductive and sexual health care, services and information is critical for the recovery of survivors and for the restoration of their dignity and bodily autonomy. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are vital human rights. Respecting and upholding these rights, particularly the right to services and information, can be the difference between life and death.

In addressing sexual based violence in conflict, we need to identify solutions and approaches that are context specific, inclusive, and informed by experience, especially that of survivors. Our actions must be survivor-centred and recognise diversity of experience and need. For example, children born of rape, and their mothers, have particular needs and we must not forget that male survivors, including boys, have their own barriers to accessing services.

We emphasise the importance of ensuring that our military, police and service providers develop positive internal cultures, that are gender-sensitive and do not tolerate violence. Further, we encourage the use of gender advisers in peacekeeping, the military and police and note that the representation of women is not the same as gender expertise.

Finally, diverse women must be involved in all aspects of our efforts to end sexual violence and in the design and implementation of services to survivors of sexual violence in conflict. Australia commends the extraordinary work of survivor-advocates, civil society organisations and human rights defenders. We call on member states to listen to their voices and support their work.

Thank you.