

## **Gender Action for Peace and Security – Sexual Violence UN Report secretariat statement**

5 March 2024

On 4 March 2024, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, released [her report](#) following her visit to Israel and the occupied West Bank. The occupied Gaza Strip is not within the scope of the report. The report, which is neither intended nor mandated to be investigative in nature, compiles preliminary findings to support the United Nations Secretary General. All quotations in this statement are from the report. The report makes clear that information in “large part [is] sourced from Israeli national institutions”, and nevertheless finds “reasonable grounds” for some acts of sexual violence on 7<sup>th</sup> October and stronger “clear and convincing” evidence for sexual violence committed against hostages held by Hamas.

The report examines allegations of sexual violence in three different areas.

1. “Based on the examination of available information, including credible statements by eyewitnesses, there are reasonable grounds to believe that multiple incidents of rape, including gang rape, occurred in and around the Nova festival site.” Whether sexual violence occurred systematically or the “verification of sexual violence [at other sites such as kibbutzim and escape routes] against these victims was not possible at this point” largely due to the limited scope of the visit, missing evidence and not being able to speak to any survivors of the 7<sup>th</sup> October attacks. Several highly publicised cases of sexual violence were found to be unsubstantiated, the report notes, as “allegations of sexual violence previously reported were determined by the mission team to be unfounded, due to either new superseding information or inconsistency in the information gathered, including first responder testimonies, photographic evidence and other information. The report notes “while it is possible that digital evidence may have been posted and then removed from official channels and social media profiles, possibly due to concerns by the various groups that it may be incriminating, it is the view of the mission team that, had clear digital evidence of sexual violence or orders to commit sexual violence been circulated in the mainstream, it would have likely been discovered given the volume of the information posted online and further recirculated, making the removal of all trace of such material unlikely.”
2. The report finds, after speaking with those formerly held hostage, that Hamas and other groups have committed sexual violence against a number of hostages and such violence may continue with those still held hostage. Specifically, the report notes “the mission team received clear and convincing information that sexual violence, including rape, sexualized torture, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment occurred against some women and children during their time in captivity and has reasonable grounds to believe that this violence may be ongoing.”
3. Sexual violence is committed by Israeli Defence Forces against Palestinian men and women across detention facilities across Israel and the occupied West Bank. These findings were established including after meeting with recently released detainees. This includes “inhuman and degrading treatment, including increased instances of various forms of sexual violence in the form of invasive body searches of detainees which include unwanted touching of intimate areas and forced unveiling of women wearing Hijab; beatings, including in the genital areas; threats of rape against women and threats of rape against female family members (wives, sisters, daughters) in the case of men; and inappropriate strip search and prolonged forced nudity of detainees, including during interrogation

and during transfer to other detention facilities. [...] They also highlighted intimidation, including threats of rape, if conditions of detention were reported or publicly disclosed after liberation.”

The distressing findings indicate the key recommendation from Ms. Patten: **“Continue to encourage the Government of Israeli to grant, without further delay, access to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel, to carry-out fully-fledged investigations into all alleged violations that would deepen the preliminary findings contained in the present report.”** Such an investigation also plays a necessary role in the public debate, where mis- and dis-information around sexual violence has further inflamed rhetoric with material consequences, including in the rise of Islamophobic and anti-Semitic hate crime and the shaping of policy responses from other governments.

An independent, impartial investigation into all alleged situations of sexual violence across all of Israel and Palestine is imperative. All survivors deserve the dignity of justice and accountability, and this can only occur through competent, impartial courts that consider information from all sources and involved parties. This requires all states, including the UK as the penholder on Women Peace and Security and a leader on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, to stridently uphold international law, enforce its consistent application, and ensure accountability. Additional aid and other forms of support to equip forensic teams; preserve evidence; provide psycho-social counselling; specifically trained medical staff and essential medical equipment must be delivered with urgency and at scale. However, delivering such aid and truly standing in solidarity with all survivors is only possible with **an immediate, comprehensive and permanent ceasefire** that includes the release of all hostages and those held in unlawful detention as a necessary preliminary step.