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Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is prepared in response to the request contained in resolution 58/1 of the Commission on the Status of Women on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts. It includes information from Member States and provides an update on attention given to issues relating to the topic in intergovernmental processes.



I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-eighth session, in 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted its resolution 58/1 on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts. Recalling its previous resolutions on the topic, the Commission continued to express its grave concern at the continuation of armed conflicts in many regions throughout the world and the human suffering and humanitarian emergencies that they caused. The Commission also noted with concern the threats posed by transnational organized crime and its increasing links with terrorism, and condemned the incidents of kidnapping and hostage-taking committed for any purpose, including raising funds or gaining political concessions. The Commission recognized that hostage-taking called for resolute, firm and concerted efforts on the part of the international community, in accordance with international human rights standards, to bring such practices to an end.

2. The Secretary-General was requested to submit to the Commission at its sixtieth session a report on the implementation of resolution 58/1, including relevant recommendations, taking into account the information provided by States and relevant international organizations. The present report is prepared in response to that request. It includes information from four Member States and provides an update on attention given to issues relating to the topic in intergovernmental processes.

II. Information from Member States

3. The Governments of Armenia, Australia, Lebanon and Senegal responded to a request sent to Member States to provide information regarding the status of implementation of resolution 58/1. Armenia reported that the provisions of the resolution were reflected in its criminal code. Australia described its implementation of provisions of the resolution through its national action plan on women, peace and security; its guidelines on the protection of civilians; its programmes on sexual and reproductive health in crisis and post-crisis settings; and its funding of community-based projects to counteract violent extremism. Lebanon reported on its implementation of provisions of the resolution through a social and individual health programme for women prisoners in the country. Senegal indicated that it observed its international obligations under resolution 58/1 and conducted training and sensitization activities with the military on key provisions thereof.

III. Attention given to issues relating to the topic in intergovernmental processes

4. Since the previous report of the Secretary-General to the Commission ([E/CN.6/2014/7](#)), the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly and the Security Council have continued to receive information on and consider a range of issues relating to the topic, including hostage-taking and abductions by terrorists and extremist groups; enforced disappearances and missing persons; and the abduction and forced recruitment of children in armed conflicts.

5. As at mid-November 2015, 94 States had signed and 50 had ratified or acceded to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has continued to advocate on behalf of women victims of enforced disappearance. At its ninety-eighth session, held from 31 October to 9 November 2012, the Working Group adopted a general comment on women affected by enforced disappearances ([A/HRC/WGEID/98/2](#)), in which it recognized that women and girls were victims of enforced disappearance as disappeared persons, as relatives of someone who had disappeared or as any other person suffering from harm as a result of an enforced disappearance, and that women and girls experienced the harms relating to enforced disappearance in different ways from men and boys because of their gender roles, which were deeply embedded in history, tradition, religion and culture. The general comment provides detailed recommendations to States on the incorporation of a gender perspective into all measures, including legislative, administrative and judicial measures, taken by States when dealing with enforced disappearances.

6. In several reports submitted to intergovernmental bodies, explicit concern was expressed about the continued incidence of hostage-taking in situations of armed conflict, including terrorist hostage-taking, the kidnapping of migrants and politically motivated kidnappings. The Human Rights Council received reports from several commissions of inquiry that examined the issues of hostage-taking and enforced disappearances of women. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic noted in its tenth report ([A/HRC/30/48](#)) that armed anti-Government groups had kidnapped more than 100 women in order to effect prisoner exchanges for women and fighters detained by the Government. The report also described the abduction of hundreds of Yazidi women during the August 2014 attack by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on the Sinjar region of northern Iraq, who were then forcibly taken across the border with the Syrian Arab Republic and held in sexual slavery. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in its report on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups ([A/HRC/28/18](#)), also detailed the abuses suffered by Yazidi women captured by ISIL, including rape, sexual slavery and forced transfer.

7. The Human Rights Council received the reports of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ([A/HRC/25/63](#) and [A/HRC/25/CRP.1](#)), which contained information regarding numerous instances of kidnapping and enforced disappearance, including of women from outside the country. The commission noted that the abduction of women on the basis that they were women was an act of gender-based violence and that women detainees were at disproportionate risk of sexual violence. The Council also received the reports of the commission of inquiry on human rights in Eritrea ([A/HRC/29/42](#) and [A/HRC/29/CRP.1](#)), which detailed women's experiences of enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention in the country.¹ Former inmates described the conditions of detention in one prison where pregnant women and children were among those held in incommunicado detention as unbearable and harrowing. The

¹ The commission of inquiry noted that the distinction between "enforced disappearance" and "incommunicado detention" was often blurred, and concluded that whenever State authorities concealed the fate of persons or their whereabouts, thereby placing them outside the protection of the law, it amounted to enforced disappearance ([A/HRC/29/CRP.1](#), para. 791).

report also documented the experiences of the wives, mothers and children of male victims of enforced disappearance, who suffered violations of their right to learn the truth about the whereabouts of disappeared persons, and were threatened or subjected to actual detention if they continued to seek to establish the whereabouts of their husbands and fathers.

8. The Security Council has explicitly expressed concern over hostage-taking in situations of conflict, giving particular attention to the abduction of women and girls by terrorist groups. In its resolution 2199 (2015), the Council condemned in the strongest terms abductions of women and children and expressed outrage at their exploitation and abuse committed by ISIL, the Nusrah Front and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida. In its resolution 2222 (2015), the Council strongly condemned incidents of kidnapping of journalists committed by terrorist groups and acknowledged the specific risks faced by women journalists. In its resolution 2225 (2015), the Council expressed grave concern at mass abductions targeting girls and urged all parties to conflict to release abducted children immediately, safely and unconditionally. The Council has also addressed issues relating to the hostage-taking of women and children more generally, including in its resolution 2143 (2014), in which it strongly condemned all violations of applicable international law involving the recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict, including abductions.

9. During the reporting period, the Security Council continued to consider the area of women and peace and security, including its nexus to the prevention of violent extremism and the abduction and enforced disappearance of women by terrorist groups. In its resolution 2242 (2015), adopted on 13 October 2015, the Council recognized that women were often directly targeted by terrorist groups, and, in that regard, made reference to the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence ([S/2015/203](#)). The Council expressed its intention to consider, among other measures, designating terrorist groups engaged in forced disappearances and other violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of human rights in situations of armed conflict, including sexual and gender-based violence, when adopting or renewing targeted sanctions.

10. In response to Security Council resolution 2122 (2013), the Secretary-General commissioned *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace*, a global study on the implementation of Council resolution 1325 (2000), which was published in October 2015. The study examined good practices, gaps and challenges in the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and emerging issues relating to the women and peace and security agenda. It included a chapter on women countering violent extremism and described the abduction of women and girls and their subsequent mistreatment as one example of the threat to women's rights posed by extremist groups. The study recommended, among other things, that conflict early warning systems include increases in reports of the abduction of women and girls as an indicator of rising insecurity.

11. Intergovernmental bodies have also remained seized of efforts to end the taking of women and girls as hostages, including through the reports and briefings of the special representatives of the Secretary-General. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has continued to update lists of parties to conflict that engage in the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, among other violations of international law. Most recently, the

annual report of the Special Representative ([A/70/162](#)) included information on the significant increase in the number of abductions of children, increasingly perpetrated on a wide scale by extremist groups. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has also been seized of the issue of women taken hostage, and the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence included information on the abduction, kidnapping or hostage-taking of women and girls in Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 67/177, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the Assembly on missing persons ([A/69/293](#)), which included information on children reported missing in armed conflicts.

IV. Observations and recommendations

12. Since the issuance of the previous report, abductions, enforced disappearances and kidnappings of women and children, in particular by terrorist groups, have received attention from intergovernmental bodies, including the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly and the Security Council. Reports to those bodies have increasingly detailed women's and girls' experiences of these violations in a comprehensive manner, and resolutions, statements and other outcomes have reflected the gravity of these crimes. In a notable advance, the normative framework for women and peace and security, as adopted by the Security Council, now explicitly recognizes the importance of sanctions against groups that abduct women and children for the purposes of terrorism and perpetrate other crimes against them in captivity.

13. The contributions of Member States to the present report demonstrate efforts to strengthen legislative and policy mechanisms for the protection of women and children. The four responses received, however, provide only a limited indication of the work in this area. The low response rate may be indicative of the increased reporting on and consideration of issues covered in resolution 58/1 in other intergovernmental processes, as detailed in the present report. Therefore, the Commission on the Status of Women may wish to consider streamlining inputs on this topic as part of established contributions to intergovernmental and expert bodies, including relevant reports of the Secretary-General, rather than as a separate biennial report to the Commission.