

**SENATE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE:
UNSCR 1325 ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY**

March 24, 2014

Dear Madam Chair and Senators,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

The Nobel Women's Initiative was founded in 2006 by six courageous women Nobel peace laureates to magnify the power and visibility of women working in countries around the world for peace with justice and equality. Over the last 8 years, we have supported grassroots women's organizations and movements by spotlighting and promoting their work, providing access to officials, amplifying their messages to the international community and bringing them together to build new networks. The women we support come from a range of conflict areas, including but not limited to, Sudan, Burma, DRC, Liberia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Iran.

Three weeks ago we took a delegation of Canadian and American women to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There we met with local women activists, sexual violence survivors, government officials and representatives from the UN and other international organizations. As you've heard so often before, sexual violence in the DRC is of crisis, epic proportions. A recent study estimated that 48 women are raped there every hour. It's hard to know if that statistic is true, but I can tell you that it is hard to meet a woman in the Congo who has not been touched in some way by sexual violence.

I want to tell you about one of the extraordinarily brave young women we met. From October 2012 to May 2013, 16-year-old Mireille was held by militia men and repeatedly raped, sometimes by 10 men at once. She became pregnant and now has an 8-month-old son. She wonders what she would tell her son. Every time she looks at her child she sees the faces of her attackers. She told us her story, hoping that by speaking out the international community would rally to stop these atrocities. She also echoed the calls of many others who told us, 'on a soif de la paix'.

The war in DRC is meant to be over. A peace agreement was signed in 2009. Yet, peace has not come for the women of DRC. What we have learned in the DRC--and many other countries—is that sexual violence does not abate with the signing of peace agreements. In many cases, women are not in a physical or psychological state to take care of the children born of rape, rejecting or abusing them. Fragile legal systems do not prioritize prosecutions of rape, some even allow, and encourage, rapists to marry their victims in order to escape punishment. And the cycle of violence continues.

Lucky for Mireille, she received support from other women who directed her to SOFEPADI (Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral).

SOFEPADI was founded in 2003 by 24 women committed to fighting against impunity for sexual violence in the Ituri and North Kivu provinces of DRC. As they proudly showed us around their clinic in Bunia, they told us how it is the only one, in an area the size of Spain, that supports rape victims holistically by providing medical services, legal accompaniment and psychological services. It does not get government funding nor is it supported by international agencies. But it is an example of everything that our governments aspire to: SOFEPADI delivers highly effective services and support to women, tailored to their specific needs, at a very low cost. It is sustainable because the idea came from the grassroots, their solutions are homegrown, and the women who have once entered the doors as victims carry on to become the next care providers and change agents.

That afternoon, we had the privilege of meeting 30 women from organizations supported by the Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises. SOFEPADI launched the Congolese Women's Fund to provide small grants of \$1000-\$5000 to small women's organizations in villages far from cities and the eyes of international donors. It was one of the most inspiring afternoons of the trip as woman after woman shared what she & her organization was doing to support women, end violence & build peaceful communities – on a shoestring.

And it is exactly these kinds of efforts that UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is meant to support and foster.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was a historic moment and significant milestone for women working for peace with justice and equality. It provides for comprehensive and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of peace processes, pre, during and post conflict. It is meant to spearhead mechanisms and policies that would bring women to the peace table, to negotiate their future in post-conflict settings, to highlight the impact of war on women and to eliminate violence against women in conflict—including sexual violence.

Sadly, governments around the world have failed to live up to their promise to bring women to the center of peace processes. Women have represented fewer than eight percent of participants and fewer than three percent of signatories, and no woman has ever been appointed chief or lead mediator in UN-sponsored peace talks. For 14 years now, women have worked hard to ensure governments around the world are implementing UNSCR 1325 but they face tremendous obstacles, discrimination and threats as they organize for peace.

Let me give you two examples:

- 1) The women of Syria were excluded from the peace talks that took place in January 2014 in Geneva, known as Geneva II. Syrian women had campaigned for months to be included in peace talks. The day of the negotiations, the

women were standing outside the venue the talks took place ready to engage in the process but the doors remained closed.

- 2) Another example is Burma, or Myanmar. Women have been under attack as part of military offensives by the Burmese military against ethnic groups. Women's grassroots organizations have spared no efforts to document thousands of rape cases committed by the military and advocated for years for an international inquiry into rape as weapon of war in Burma. Moreover, they have organized trainings at the community level about UNSCR 1325. Yet, as another chance of a nation-wide ceasefire is approaching, women are systematically excluded. A study from 2012 of 83 peace agreements found that they are 60% less likely to fail when they're inclusive.

Throughout the numerous delegations we have undertaken, we have witnessed the inspiring work being done by women's organizations like those in DRC, Syria, Burma. They are the peacemakers stitching communities back together after violence and insecurity. The challenges are vast but there is much Canada and the international community can do to support these women in bringing peace to their communities.

Most pressingly, we must work together to stop rape and sexual violence in conflict. Rape is used as a war strategy to destroy communities and the social fabric of society.

Two years ago, the Laureates of the Nobel Women's Initiative, together with dozens of experts and grassroots organizations, came together to form the International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict. The Campaign calls for: powerful and urgent leadership on the local, national, regional and international levels to prevent and stop rape and gender violence in war and conflict situations; a dramatic increase in resources for prevention and protection and for psychosocial and physical healing for survivors, their families and communities including concerted efforts to end stigma of survivors; and justice for victims, including prosecution of perpetrators at national, regional and international levels, and comprehensive reparation for survivors.

Governments have taken note, and added it to the international agenda. The first ever Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict will be hosted by the UK this June. And it is time for all of our governments to show leadership in living up to their commitments ensuring UNSCR 1325, along with all related resolutions, is fully implemented. Canada has a key role to play in this effort. Today, I would like to ask for bold and meaningful action by the Canadian government to support efforts around the world to end sexual violence in conflict.

- The Campaign calls on the Government of Canada to participate meaningfully, at the ministerial level, in the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in

the UK in June, and to work with civil society to develop concrete, long-term commitments.

- Leadership requires resources. The Campaign is asking Canada to create a global fund to support women's organizations and women's human rights defenders working on women's rights and specifically on sexual violence.
- The Campaign is calling on the Government of Canada to fund the full range of sexual and reproductive health services including pregnancies resulting from rape, without discrimination (as recognized in Security Council Resolution 2122).
- The Campaign is calling on the Government of Canada to sign the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).
- The Campaign is asking that the commitments made by the Government of Canada through Canada's National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (NAP) be fully implemented, and that women's organizations in Canada be included as allies in this process. To help accomplish this, the Campaign is asking for the appointment of a high-level champion for ending sexual violence in conflict that can liaise between government departments and civil society, and monitor the implementation of the NAP.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to appear today and to discuss these issues in greater detail in the near future.

Liz Bernstein
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