



US WOMEN'S CAUCUS

AT THE UN

July 16, 2021

The Honorable Linda Thomas-Greenfield
Ambassador of the United States
United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York NY 10017

Dear Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield:

The US Women's Caucus at the UN extends our great appreciation to you for calling the first open meeting at the United Nations Security Council on the crisis in Tigray on July 2. That meeting is a giant step in the right direction. We also commend the statement that U.S. Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken presented on May 23 as well as the U.S. joint statement with the European Union on June 10 highlighting the humanitarian crisis in Tigray.

We are especially heartened by your statement, "An open meeting is not enough. We need to see actions on the ground." We believe that one of the most important actions on the ground is to find ways to prevent further military sexual violence by all sides against women and girls, including accountability for those responsible for such actions during the conflict.

For far too long and far too often, systematic military sexual violence has persisted in conflicts around the world. Because of UN actions, military sexual violence is now widely considered a grave violation of human rights, permanently impacting victims, families, communities, and societies across generations. We urge UN efforts to continue and violators to be held to account.

UN condemnation of sexual violence in conflict came to the fore in 1996 when UN Special Rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy completed her report, *Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences*. Two years later, UN Special Rapporteur Gay McDougall released her report, *Systematic Rape, Sexual Slavery, and Slavery-like Practices During Armed Conflicts*. McDougall stated, "The women and children who were held there against their will inside these 'comfort stations' were then subjected to acts of rape and sexual violence on such a massive scale that the nature of the crime may only properly be described as a crime against humanity."

Following those compelling reports and in response to persistent advocacy from civil society, the Security Council has addressed sexual violence in conflict repeatedly. In 2000, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, recognizing the grave and unique impact armed conflict has on women. Eight years later, Security Council Resolution 1820 condemned the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war, stating that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide." Since then, the Security Council has adopted eight more resolutions on women, peace, and security. Resolution 2493, adopted in October 2019, is the most recent one.

The fact that atrocities continue despite these important efforts means there is much more work to be done. **Words must be turned into action.**

We know that the United States has played a major role in collective efforts against sexual violence in conflict. We strongly support your wish to “show that African lives matter as much as other lives around the world.” We thank you for your efforts and urge you to continue to do all you can as the US Ambassador to the United Nations to condemn and prevent these egregious human rights violations against women and girls.

Yours sincerely,

The Rev. Susan H. Lee, Ph.D.
President
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