



## Security Council High-Level Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, 'Preventing Conflict Related Sexual Violence through Demilitarisation and Gender-responsive arms control', 23 April 2024

Malta Statement delivered by the Hon. Dr Christopher Fearne  
Deputy Prime Minister of Malta

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I shall now deliver a statement in my capacity as the Deputy Prime Minister of Malta.

I begin by thanking SRSG Patten for her dedication to eliminating conflict-related sexual violence. My appreciation also extends to UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Ms Danai Gurira, and our esteemed CSO briefer Ms Niemat Ahmadi. As we convene today, global military spending exceeded a staggering \$2.4 trillion in 2023. Considering this, we converge on the crucial discussion of preventing CRSV through demilitarisation and disarmament, foundational UN principles that lie at the heart of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.



Today, our aim is to catalyse momentum and share best practices in leveraging arms control and disarmament strategies to prevent CRSV. It is also to increase women's leadership and influence in disarmament fora, where their voices are often underrepresented.

The proliferation of over one billion small arms and light weapons globally fuels terrorism, organised crime, and conflicts. This is why the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women mandates robust arms regulation. This is why the Arms Trade Treaty prohibits weapons transfers that have the potential to facilitate gender-based violence. This is why the UN Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons recommends gender-responsive monitoring and analysis in national arms control mechanisms.

WPS advocates must lead by example, by curbing military spending and halting arms exports to conflict zones. Malta was an early signatory of the Arms Trade Treaty, and we urge all remaining States to sign, ratify, and fully implement the ATT.



The African Union's call to silence the guns deserves to be fully supported. Yet, in Sudan, illicit arms deliveries and complex financing networks are implicated in the systematic sexual violence against women and girls, while flagrantly violating the arms embargo. As we mark one year into this ongoing brutal conflict, no new entities have been listed, despite the Panel of Experts' detailed reporting of egregious violations.

Over 70% of listed parties in the SRSG's report have evaded accountability for years. In Israel and Palestine, all acts of CRSV must be condemned and accounted for, regardless of who committed them.

In Afghanistan, we condemn the Taliban's systematic gender persecution and appalling levels of sexual and gender-based violence. This is why Malta supports the codification of gender apartheid, which would enable victims and survivors, present and future, to hold perpetrators to account for the totality of crimes committed.



UN Sanctions Committees should incorporate sexual and gender-based violence as a stand-alone criterion. Gender expertise and briefings by the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict can advance the Committees' work to deter violence by all parties, including mercenaries and private military and security companies.

Women's rights defenders like Ms Ahmadi exemplify courage and leadership. However, they remain unprotected and underfunded. This is especially true in the context of UN withdrawals, where civic space continues to narrow, and where services are limited, from Tigray to Cox's Bazar. Among the 21 countries covered in the Secretary-General's report, the UN has deployed Women Protection Advisers to only eight.

We can do better than this. We must do better.



CRSV must be central to ceasefire agreements, security sector reforms, and arms control efforts. Colombia's gender-responsive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programs offer a promising blueprint for preventing and responding to sexual violence in these contexts.

Structural gender inequalities, poverty, and misogyny fuel CRSV. A collective response is needed to dismantle the patriarchal systems that limit women's full, equal, meaningful, and safe participation in all spheres: political, economic, social, and cultural.

The New Agenda for Peace calls on us to challenge and transform entrenched gender norms and institutional barriers. Let us heed this call. Let us stand united to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence, ensuring that peace and security prevail for all.

I thank you.