



UNA-UK Interview, 18 February 2013

James Kearney, Peace and Security Programmes Manager, talks with **UN Under-Secretary-General Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict**

JK: You began your role as Special Representative of the Secretary-General in June 2012. What is the greatest challenge you have faced thus far?

ZWB: Thank you very much, it is a pleasure to be here with you and I want to first thank you and the UN Association of the UK for your continued support and commitment for what we do in the UN. The announcement for my appointment was made in June 2012, but I actually officially took up office in September 2012, allowing me to properly hand over as a government Minister in Sierra Leone and prepare my transition to move to New York. After taking over my new assignment, going through the briefing prepared by the staff in my office, which included reading volumes of papers, I quickly realised that the biggest challenge is how to ensure that Member States take responsibility and leadership, as well as ownership of the fight against conflict-related sexual violence in their countries. They cannot see it just as a UN issue; it actually belongs to them, and they have the moral and legal responsibility to provide security for their citizens, especially the most vulnerable – women and children. The UN has created the international legal framework with the adoption of ground breaking United Nations Security Council Resolutions – 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1960. I therefore believe the biggest challenge we now face is in implementation -- how can states make use of these resolutions, take responsibility and provide the political leadership at the national level that is required to address this scourge. The UN should serve as a catalyst and a moral guarantor, using its convening powers to ensure this issue is taken from the margins to the mainstream of international law and global security policy. To fight and end impunity, we must go after the perpetrators and prosecute them wherever they are. This is critical for prevention. The UN on its own does not have the resources, man power and capacity to prosecute everybody who commits these crimes. To end impunity

governments must ensure that their national legal frameworks criminalize sexual violence in line with their obligations under international law, and rigorously investigate and prosecute these crimes. We have to remember that the majority of the people who commit the atrocities are foot soldiers who, because of their numbers, can only be prosecuted at the national levels, whilst the UN can go after those who bear the greatest responsibility, those who give the command for attacks and atrocities to be committed. This will close the 'impunity gap' that now exists and act as deterrent for would be perpetrators as well as provide acknowledgement, healing and comfort to survivors. It is important for women and girls to see that soldiers who abducted them, raped them, forced them into sex slavery and thus destroyed their lives, are not only being held to account, but prosecuted. By taking such an action, Member States will be able to break the culture of silence and denial.

JK: What more can national governments and regional security organisations such as the G8 and NATO do to support your offices, the ICC and the UN, practically and politically on this issue?

ZWB: Firstly, from a bilateral and multilateral perspective they should provide financial resources to support the work we and colleagues in UN Action do as well as the service provision by NGOs and local civil society organizations. They should also support the work of the ICC and other international tribunals in terms of investigating and prosecuting sexual violence crimes. The ICC needs resources and political backing to continue prosecuting such crimes. My office also needs resources for the Team of Experts whose role it is to support governments to strengthen their response through legislative reform, training of police and judiciary, etc. The Team is becoming a vital resource for conflict and post-conflict countries dealing with the problems of sexual violence. Our colleagues in the UN Action network, which consists of 13 UN entities working as one to stop wartime rape, as well as international and local NGOs, who provide most of the critical medical and other services for survivors, also need continued funding support. In countries like the Central African Republic, Sudan (Darfur), South Sudan and Mali, for example, NGO and UN colleagues have serious constraints in providing support services to victims and survivors because of the lack of resources. Governments and regional

organizations also have to continue to advocate for access for monitoring, reporting and service provision.

Secondly, donor partners like the members of the G8 should understand that, for example, in Africa, women – who constitute over 50% of the populations, and form 70% of the informal sector – are responsible for producing 80% of the food consumed and responsible for putting 100% of the food on the table, not only form a substantial percentage of the continent's valuable human resources, but are crucial in the overall development paradigm of the continent. Without addressing issues relating to their security, there can be no significant movement in the development agenda. This is why I encourage other countries to undertake similar initiatives as the U.K. to mainstream the issue of sexual violence in conflict as a central priority of its foreign policy and to move it from the margins of its aid policy to the mainstream of development assistance. By so doing, it will be possible to unleash the extraordinary potential that the full participation of women can bring in terms of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

Thirdly, we are working very closely, and look forward to continuing to do so, with Fatou Bensouda of the ICC. We are extremely happy that she has made a commitment to give special attention to the issue of sexual violence in all her investigations and indictments. This sends a powerful signal of intent, which we will use in our negotiations with parties to conflict for prevention measures that they must take. We continue to engage with her and her team, to share information and our analysis.

JK: You cited tackling impunity as a priority when you took on the job. What progress has there been in this area, and how closely do you work with Fatou Bensouda towards fulfilling resolution 1960?

ZHB: Ending impunity is the first of my six key priorities. It is only by bringing criminals who commit these crimes to justice, and sending a message to perpetrators and would-be perpetrators that there will be no hiding place for them in the world, that we will see an end to this scourge. This is why we are not only working closely with the ICC to prosecute those who bear superior and command responsibility, but also with national governments to enable and encourage them to undertake prosecutions at the national level. As I mentioned, we are working very hard to

promote national ownership, responsibility and leadership as well as building global political will amongst heads of State and government to collectively address this problem and end impunity. We believe that solutions cannot be imposed from outside. We must work with all stakeholders, both international and national, to change the mindset of political leaders, traditional, religious and military leaders, as well as ordinary citizens. As mentioned earlier, we work very closely with Fatou Bensouda. There are explicit instances, like Guinea, where our engagement is close and complementary. We have been advocating with the government of Guinea to encourage them to appoint a panel of judges to investigate and prosecute all those responsible for the 28th September 2009 mass rape at the national stadium. This decision was taken in the aftermath of the International Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate the incident. The UN Team of Experts has now deployed a senior legal practitioner to support this panel of judges and that work is going very well.

JK: In 2007 the UN adopted the UN Action strategic approach whereby UN agencies would work together on this particular issue. Could you give me one example of a tangible way in which people on the ground have benefitted by these 13 organisations working together, specifically in terms of protection?

ZHB: One example would be the training that has been developed for peacekeepers, which they undergo before they are deployed. This scenario-based training was developed with the input of all UN Action member agencies and it ensures that peacekeepers hit the ground with an understanding of sexual violence, the knowledge that their mandate and rules of engagement require them to address it and concrete prevention strategies they can use that keep sexual violence from happening in the first place.

Other examples would include the provision of services in which diverse organizations work together to provide a holistic approach to treating survivors of sexual violence in conflict, including their medical, economic, legal and psycho-social needs. Mobile courts which provide access to justice in remote areas and the creation of mechanisms for the monitoring, analysis and reporting of incidences of sexual violence are two other examples of UN Action programs that have made a difference for people on the ground.

JK: How can civil society organisations, such as UNA-UK and its sister UNAs worldwide, support the UN Action network's 'Advocacy in Action' programme?

ZHB: Firstly, they can help us lobby their governments to put this issue firmly on the government's agenda. By so doing they will be able to provide resources for all the work we do, including colleagues in UN Action as well as NGOs who provide services to victims and survivors. Secondly, they can encourage their government to see this issue as an international peace and security matter that requires a peacekeeping, justice and services response. UNA-UK can play a critical role in enhancing public understanding of the problem and mobilizing the public and media to speak out; this puts governments under more pressure to act. It is important that we begin to shift the stigma of sexual violence from the victims to the perpetrators. UNA-UK can help us to shine the spotlight on the perpetrators and help us send the message that the international community will go after them and get them wherever they go. We have to make sexual violence used as a tactic of war the great moral issue of our time, and eradicate it as we eradicated the slave trade.

JK: In 2007 Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that, "In no other area is our collective failure to ensure effective protection for civilians more apparent, than in terms of the masses of women and girls, but also boys and men, whose lives are destroyed each year by sexual violence perpetrated in conflict." How are you seeking to turn collective failure into collective success?

ZHB: By making sure that we all work as a team and I think my biggest supporter has been the Secretary-General, who has made sure that this issue is mentioned in all his major statements and speeches. Whether he is making a public lecture, addressing Heads of States, or making a press briefing, he always raises the issue of sexual violence. He has also in major cases made press releases to raise his concerns. It is an issue that is very close to his heart and he keeps himself well informed, and as and when the need arises, he always intervenes to ensure that it is given the attention it deserves. I think the reason is, as you have just read, that you have to have collective effort. This is why we are very happy with the UK initiative; it's not only about having an adopted resolution in the Security Council, but what can we do to provide support morally and financially at the bilateral level. This is to engage countries where these crimes are committed, to make sure that within the country political leadership is provided. It is only when we integrate political priorities and

development aid that we can compel heads of states of countries where these crimes are being committed to break the culture of silence. Only then can we force them to address the issue, force them to take national ownership and responsibility, to lead from the front, give hope to victims and provide a process of healing to the women, children and men who have suffered violations. As they work on rebuilding and constructing their country, they also must rebuild the lives of survivors. It is this concerted effort that we want countries to undertake. The Head of State in a given country must be aware that if the country is to benefit from international support, they must demonstrate a commitment to raise up the survivors of sexual violence and hold accountable the perpetrators. We are building this relationship and now, in the UN, we have what you call the friends of the mandate, countries in Europe, Asia and the Pacific, Latina America and Africa. We are looking at ways and means by which we can build an international campaign, to let this come out in the open, and shine the light on the perpetrators. As far as stigma towards the victims of the perpetrators, countries will understand that we have to meet this, and that is what I am working towards.

JK: Thank you very much for your time, it has been a pleasure.

ZHB: Thank you

About Zainab Hawa Bangura

On 22 June 2012, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the appointment of Zainab Hawa Bangura of Sierra Leone as his Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict at the level of Under-Secretary-General. Ms. Bangura replaces Margot Wallström, to whom the Secretary-General is grateful for her dedicated service and able leadership in achieving milestones within a challenging mandate.

Prior to this, Ms. Bangura was the Minister of Health and Sanitation for the Government of Sierra Leone, and brings to the position over 20 years of policy, diplomatic and practical experience in the field of governance, conflict resolution and reconciliation in Africa. She was previously the second female Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, including Chief Adviser and Spokesperson of the President on bilateral and international issues. Ms. Bangura has been instrumental in developing national programmes on affordable health, advocating for the elimination of genital mutilation, managing the country's Peace Building Commission and contributing to the multilateral and bilateral relations with the international community. She is experienced in meeting with interlocutors in diverse situations, including rebel groups, and familiar in dealing with State and non-State actors relevant to issues of sexual violence while fighting corruption and impunity.

Ms. Bangura has on-the-ground experience with peacekeeping operations from within the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), where she was responsible for the management of the largest civilian component of the Mission, including promoting capacity-building of government institutions and community reconciliation. She is an experienced results-driven civil society, human and women's rights campaigner and democracy activist, notably as Executive Director of the National Accountability Groups, Chair and Co-founder of the Movement for Progress Party of Sierra Leone, as well as Coordinator and Co-founder of the Campaign for Good Governance.

Ms. Bangura is a former fellow of the Chartered Insurance Institute of London, possessing Diplomas in Insurance Management from the City University Business School of London and Nottingham University. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

Born in 1959, Ms. Bangura is married with two children.