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Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your letter dated 29 May 2015 concerning female victims of war rape.

The European Commission is actively providing humanitarian assistance to the internally displaced in North-Eastern Nigeria through multi-sectorial humanitarian assistance, including to the women that have been rescued from Boko Haram by the armed forces.

We are highly concerned with the fate of women and girl survivors of rape, including those who do not have access to safe abortions or are forced to carry to term unwanted pregnancies. Some rape survivors expose themselves to risky illegal abortions in unsafe conditions - and many die as a consequence - others attempt to self-abort and some even commit suicide. Unsafe abortion is listed by the World Health Organization as one of the three leading causes of maternal mortality. Women and girls in all these situations face heightened health risks (both physical and psychological) and exacerbated social suffering.

Moreover, children born from rape and their mothers are often rejected by their families and communities, including in conflict situations, where they may be associated with the enemy. This exacerbates the already high vulnerability of women and girl survivors of sexual assault and their children, who are often excluded from their social system and condemned to live in dire conditions.

The EU has adopted a survivor-centred approach to sexual and gender-based violence in its humanitarian aid. We strongly advocate that both prevention and response components should be available to victims. Assistance includes medical care, psychological support and referral to legal services and socio-economic assistance. Moreover, awareness-raising strategies must be pursued to fight stigma; coordination between humanitarian agencies is also necessary to protect beneficiaries from sexual exploitation and abuse.

In cases where the pregnancy threatens a woman's or a girl's life or causes unbearable suffering, international humanitarian law and/or international human rights law may justify offering a safe abortion rather than perpetuating what amounts to inhumane treatment. Women and girls who are pregnant as a result of rape should first receive appropriate and comprehensive information and be provided access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services. Naturally, these will depend on the woman's wishes, on her condition, on the security of the humanitarian workers, as well as on other context-related factors.

In addition, allow us to emphasise that the EU has traditionally been a very active supporter of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including the latest resolutions. In its Second Report on EU-indicators for the Comprehensive Approach to the EU Implementation of the UN Security

Council Resolutions 1325 & 1820 on Women, Peace and Security, the EU committed to focus its attention in the next reporting period (2013 – 2015) on preventing sexual violence in conflicts and to analyse and refresh the EU's Indicators. The Third Implementation Report is to be prepared and adopted by the end of this year. We are currently reviewing the EU indicators where an indicator on sexual violence in conflict will be added to take into account these latest developments.

The EU is very committed to ending sexual violence in conflict. A Guide to Practical Actions for Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict was adopted by the Political and Security Committee at the end of 2014 following the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in London last year, and the Call to Action on Protecting Girls and Women in Emergencies.

In the framework of the G8/G7 Foreign Ministers' meetings, the EU supported the historic declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2013 and its follow-up statement in 2015.

We hope you find this update useful.

Yours sincerely,



Federica Mogherini



Christos Stylianides

***Letter addressed to:***

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