



Council of Europe

North South Center Award Ceremony 2013

Speech by Monika Hauser,  
Founder and Executive Member of the Managing Board of *medica mondiale*

Lisbon, 21st May 2013

Dear Mr Cavaco Silva,

Dear Ms Esteves,

Dear Ms Bataini,

Dear Ms Bergamini,

Dear Mr Amaral,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to speak to you today. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe for awarding this special honour to Asma Jahangir and myself.

The history of wartime rape is as old as human history itself and continues into the 20th and 21st centuries. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, between 20,000 and 50,000 women of all ages were raped and tortured. During the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the number of women who suffered the same fate has been estimated at between a quarter and a half a million. In the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo there is still no end in sight to the rapes. Estimates suggest hundreds of thousands of women and girls have been victims of sexualised violence during the decades of conflict in the region. Rapes also took place during the unrest following the presidential elections in the Ivory Coast in 2010 and during the civil war in Libya in 2011. And women are being raped just now in Syria. The perpetrators are soldiers in official armies, rebels, paramilitaries or police officers. And they are also UN soldiers and

civilians. Rape as a weapon of war is used as part of a strategy to achieve specific military aims. However, rapes also occur indiscriminately and are then tolerated silently by the respective leaders. And men frequently join up with rebel groups for this reason alone: it gives them the opportunity to rape without being punished.

However, this type of violence does not necessarily need a war. We only have to examine our own patriarchal structures and we will see that sexualised violence is one of the most frequent crimes carried out in peacetime societies such as Germany. A study commissioned by the German Ministry for Women in 2004 discovered that 40 per cent of the women questioned had experienced physical or sexualised violence or both since their 16th birthday. And: Do you know when Germany passed its law declaring rape within marriage to be a crime? It was in 1997. That is only 16 years ago! And it would not have been possible without a cross-party women's initiative fighting hard to get it through. In fact, none of us in Europe have any reason to boast.

I am listing these facts here to make sure that nobody has the bright idea of claiming this is a marginal problem or – as we often hear – a “women's issue”. As we can see it is also not the problem of a specific culture – much more it concerns patriarchal societies worldwide. Behind each of these statistics there are individual women – survivors – who often have to bear the consequences of this violence for the rest of their lives. Let me try to express that even more clearly: We are talking about severe violations of human rights which have extremely detrimental effects on the victim's somatic, psychological and social integrity. The individual woman is degraded; her most intimate self is deeply injured; and her dignity is trampled down. This applies to rape in so-called times of peace. But of course, the degradation, injuries and violation of dignity are often even more extreme in wartime and post-war contexts.

I would like to quote a Bosnian woman who came to Medica Zenica after being raped multiple times as a 19-year-old during the war. She said: “When I hear the word ‘rape’, it is as if someone is calling my name.” Many women suffer for years or decades from psychological and physical post-traumatic symptoms such as panic attacks, chronic pain and cancers – and they simply no longer feel at home in their life. The probability of trauma symptoms becoming chronic is very high for victims of rape – over 50%. Along with the life-long impairments mentioned already, the women also suffer social consequences such as stigmatisation and social exclusion, which then often jeopardises a woman's ability to support herself and her family. For this reason, many see no

possibility to talk about what happened to them and this socially enforced obligation to remain silent then leads to even more suffering. We also have to assume that if they remain silent, the majority of survivors never receive any specific support.

The devastating effects of wartime sexualised violence are not reserved for the individual women alone. Their families and their whole social environment are affected, too. In fact, these consequences persist into the next generations. The worldwide outcry against the mass rapes committed in Bosnia in 1993 led during the following two decades to increased awareness of sexualised wartime violence and its severe consequences. This was only possible because of the courage of the Bosnian women who spoke out publicly to tell the world what had happened to them. We also need to thank the untiring, unflinching efforts of women's rights activists and feminists all over the world. The achievements made include a series of good UN resolutions, the implementation of sexualised violence as war crimes in international criminal law, and frequent international conferences on the issue. Nonetheless, wartime rape and other forms of gender-specific violence in war-torn and post-war societies still continue – day in, day out.

It is the women's rights activists in the very countries, which we denote as "fragile states", who have to deal every day with the devastating effects of male violence and who try to restore the will to live of countless women and girls. They are performing courageous development work and are actively defending the values we cherish so dearly in the West. However, these women are exposing themselves to very real danger every day by refusing to hide the uncomfortable truth of the situation they face. There are wonderful EU guidelines on the protection of human rights defenders. But how can my colleagues in Herat or Goma benefit from them if they are not implemented?

Of course, it was a very important step in 1993 in Vienna when the first World Conference on Human Rights was held and when violence against women was specifically condemned as a severe violation of human rights. At the same time, just 600 km away devastating violence against Bosnian women continued unabated. It was also a definite achievement in 1994 when the UN created the position of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. But are her reports being read really by the people who have the power to change things?

UN Resolution 1325 is regarded as a milestone in the protection of women during war and in post-conflict societies, in the prevention of sexualised wartime violence, and in the increased representation of women in peace processes. However, at the same time as the resolution was being passed in the year 2000, tens of thousands of women and girls were being raped and murdered in Liberia. And the participants sitting around the tables at peace negotiations now are still 95 per cent men, even though 75 per cent of peace activists around the world are women.

In 2008, the international community eventually recognised wartime sexualised violence as a war crime and a crime against humanity. UN Resolution 1820 makes it unmistakably clear that sexualised violence can actually endanger world peace. It urges member states to act in prevention of such crimes and to ensure that the perpetrators are prosecuted. At the same time as the resolution was passed, the unrest in eastern Congo flared up again and a vast number of young girls and women suffered tremendous ordeals, with 99% of their tormentors remaining unpunished.

Women and girls – and we know now that boys and men are victims of sexualised violence as well – have been and are being raped by rebels or government soldiers in crisis areas even though UN peace keeping missions are stationed in the same areas. I remind you of the women and girls raped by over 250 rebels in the eastern Congolese town of Walikale in 2010. The UN soldiers stationed in the immediate vicinity were later heard to declare, they “had not been able to understand the language of the women asking them for help”.

Women are also sexually exploited by soldiers on peacekeeping missions despite the zero-tolerance policies operated by the UN and NATO. And despite the appointment three years ago of a UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Margot Wallström and Zeinab Bangura, the two incumbents so far, have issued regular reports and made interventions on behalf of women in need around the world, but they are not really being taken seriously.

We can warmly welcome the current initiative of the British Foreign Minister William Hague to prevent sexualised wartime violence and the related declaration issued by the G8 Foreign Ministers when they met in London in April this year. This initiative opens European politicians yet another chance to become truly aware of their responsibility and take action where they previously only paid lip service to the issue. However, this

type of politics can only gain credibility if it also looks at the roots of this violence in Western patriarchal structures and if it acknowledges the links between sexualised violence in wartime and in non-war contexts. This would mean, for example, that soldiers receive appropriate training BEFORE they are sent on missions, to make them reflect on their own images of masculinity.

Without real transformation in gender roles, nothing will really change when it comes to the worldwide discrimination of and violence against women. Surely, men should really have as much interest as women in deconstructing traditional gender stereotypes. After all, men ARE ALSO affected by sexualised violence – if it was not already known beforehand, we certainly know it since the events in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. And men would also benefit from a seriously meant understanding of gender because THEY THEMSELVES would no longer have to live up to stereotypical images of masculinity.

The West is carrying out peacekeeping missions throughout the world today, but do they also take account of the latest insights into collective traumatisation in post-war societies? Are the West's actions being led by ideas of civil conflict management and prevention? Or are the strategies and programs of action determined by patriarchal ideas of military victory and defeat? To what extent are policies being influenced by xenophobic and islamophobic attitudes?

With this in mind, I would like to ask you this: How well have our European post-war societies dealt with their own trauma? In Germany, today's generation of grandchildren are the first to really consider the complex issues of guilt, responsibility and suffering, complicated further by all of the destructive and unhealthy effects of their parents' and grandparents' silence and denial. To what extent has the Portuguese society been able to process its trauma from colonialism, the dictatorial era and the Carnation Revolution in 1974, and all the consequences of a government not listening to its people? And I would also like to ask you this: Are we really the ones most qualified to show the people in Bosnia or Afghanistan how they should best carry out the reconstruction of their society?

Please do not misunderstand me: Of course, European governments need to assume responsibility around the world – for these very reasons. But please: This should not always and only be carried out by military means. And it should definitely not take place without a clear vision of international gender equality.

**This vision is not only about justice for women. It is also the only way to achieve more development and good governance, less violence and destruction, and more inner and outer peace for all of us in this world. In order to achieve this goal we all have to assume appropriate responsibility, whatever our functions are!**

**We need to do this to honour the dignity of those women and girls who survived violence. And we also need to do it for the sake of our own dignity!**