

**Contact:** Sarah Taylor, Executive Coordinator  
NGO Working Group on Women Peace and Security  
**Email:** [staylor@womenpeacesecurity.org](mailto:staylor@womenpeacesecurity.org)  
**Tel:** (+1) 212.557.7298  
[www.womenpeacesecurity.org](http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org)

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### **NEW UN CHAMPION FOR WOMEN IN CONFLICT**

The UN Secretary-General's announced intention to appoint Margot Wallström as his new Special Representative for sexual violence in conflict could finally focus international action against these crimes, said the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGOWG).

"The UN has for too long lacked crucial leadership for its day-to-day work against rape in war," said Sarah Taylor, Executive Coordinator of the NGOWG. "The new representative has the potential to ensure the UN is more effective in preventing and responding to such crimes; helping to empower women and bring perpetrators to justice."

In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1325, which recognizes that women in conflict are often targeted for specific forms of violence, and that women must be meaningfully included in peacemaking and peacebuilding. Watchdog groups, including the NGOWG, have criticized the UN and governments for not fulfilling their women, peace and security obligations. Wallström can lead efforts to set this right.

"We're looking forward to Ms. Wallström getting the UN's house in order, particularly in this 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year of resolution 1325," said Taylor. "To effectively address sexual violence in conflict, it is absolutely essential that Member States and the rest of the UN system strongly support Ms. Wallström's office."

The effectiveness of the new Special Representative's office will also depend on Wallström's legitimacy with survivors of sexual violence and the people who support them; and credibility among a wide range of interlocutors, including high-level government officials and military commanders.

The Special Representative's office must have a clear understanding of systemic causes of sexual violence, including discrimination against women, the myths that fuel this violence, and the availability of the weapons that facilitate it.

"It is essential for Ms. Wallström to understand that women's empowerment is integral to addressing the root causes of rape in conflict," said Heidi Lehman, Director for Gender Based Violence at IRC, an NGOWG member organization. "If women continue to be excluded from peace processes, and their concerns continue to be omitted from policy, the new Special Representative will not be effecting meaningful long-term change, but merely reacting to crises."

The endemic problem of impunity for crimes of sexual violence in conflict perpetuates the cycle of sexual violence in conflict. Wallström will therefore need to work closely with the UN's rule of law and human rights experts.

"Improving the UN's response to sexual violence in war requires everyone to work together," said Ada Williams Prince, Senior Advocacy Officer at the Women's Refugee Commission, an NGOWG member organization. "Ms. Wallström can be a champion for those in the UN system who battle every day for people affected by rape in war, and she can hold to account those in the system who have been shirking their responsibilities."

### **Background**

On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2010, at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the UN Secretary-General

announced his intention to appoint Margot Wallström as his Special Representative, as requested in Security Council resolution 1888.

SCR 1888 requested that the “United Nations Secretary-General appoint a Special Representative to provide coherent and strategic leadership, to work effectively to strengthen existing United Nations coordination mechanisms, and to engage in advocacy efforts, inter alia with governments, including military and judicial representatives, as well as with all parties to armed conflict and civil society, in order to address, at both headquarters and country level, sexual violence in armed conflict, while promoting cooperation and coordination of efforts among all relevant stakeholders, primarily through the inter-agency initiative ‘United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict.’ ”

Resolution 1888 was adopted unanimously by the Security Council on 30 September 2009, and was co-sponsored by more than 60 UN Member States. Resolution 1888 builds on the principles and obligations in previous Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) on women, peace and security, and was followed by a fourth resolution on women, peace and security, SCR 1889, on 5 October 2009.

The NGOWG on Women, Peace and Security advocates for the equal and full participation of women in all efforts to create and maintain peace and security. Formed in 2000 to call for a Security Council resolution on Women, Peace and Security, the NGOWG now focuses on implementation of all Security Council resolutions that address this issue. The NGOWG serves as a bridge between women’s human rights defenders working in conflict-affected situations and policy-makers at U.N. Headquarters.

NGOWG members are: Amnesty International; Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights; Femmes Africa Solidarité; Global Action to Prevent War; Global Justice Center; Hague Appeal for Peace/Peaceboat US; Human Rights Watch; International Action Network on Small Arms; International Alert; International Rescue Committee; International Women’s Program at the Open Society Institute; International Women’s Tribune Centre; United Methodist Women’s Division, General Board of Global Ministries – United Methodist Church; Women’s Refugee Commission; Women’s Action for New Directions; Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.