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Opening remarks at ICGLR's Regional Training Facility

**'Symposium on Access to Justice and Addressing Impunity for Sexual Violence in the
Great Lakes Region'**

Kampala, Uganda, 7-9 July 2016

Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear participants, ladies and gentlemen,

My name is **Innocent Zahinda**. I am the Director of the UN Team of Experts of the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict.

I am grateful to be here today, representing the Office of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to this symposium to discuss ways of addressing impunity for sexual violence in the Great Lakes Region.

Let me first congratulate the ICGLR Regional Training Facility, the UN Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region and the African Union Commission on Peace and Security for holding this symposium.

It is a testament to the commitment of international, regional and national stakeholders to tackle the problem of sexual violence in the Great Lakes region, that so many of you are present here today for this symposium. The scourge of sexual violence in conflict has no geographic boundaries and it is my firm hope and conviction that the

ICGLR and its Member States will provide an example for other regions to follow.

In September 2014, the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, entered into a Framework of Cooperation with ICGLR, on addressing sexual violence. As part of that Framework, the Team of Experts that I lead, agreed to support the ICGLR in building its capacity and specifically to support the ICGLR's Regional Training Facility to deliver training conflict-related sexual violence for stakeholders in the region.

Since then, the Team of Experts has been honoured to cooperate with the RTF, through the organisation of a series of joint training workshops on addressing sexual violence, the past two years. The first training was held in Entebbe, in December 2014, and focused on strengthening the capacity of police in the Great Lakes Region to use and manage forensic evidence in relation to sexual violence crimes. 22 police officers from ICGLR Member States were successfully trained on this issue.

The second workshop was organised in Kampala in September 2015 and focused on training military justice officials on investigating and prosecuting sexual violence crimes. Were invited to the training; military investigators and prosecutors from the Central African Republic, the DRC, Uganda, South Sudan and Sudan.

As we progress through the next three days, you will appreciate the important role that you can play in addressing sexual violence

crimes; in all its forms, from rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced castration, and other crimes of comparable gravity; including when it happens in the conflict or post-conflict context.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One of the main impediments to efforts in addressing sexual violence crimes in the Great Lakes region remains the issue of national capacity. Even where there is a political will, actors in the penal chain in many contexts lack the expertise to handle sexual violence crimes. In response to this, my Team has supported national rule of law institutions, building on their initiatives, and strengthening their ability to fight against impunity. These include **police, judges, prosecutors, legal aid providers, Ministries of Justice, Ministries of Defense, adhoc investigations and prosecutions mechanisms,** and so on.

In this regard, the past five years the Team of Experts has noted **six main entry points** which I think could help enrich your discussions and exchanges the next three days:

1. **Ensuring adequate law reform and review:** In many contexts, the legal framework does not adequately address sexual violence crimes. Most penal codes in ICGLR countries prohibit and punish rape. However, many do not provide an adequate definition of sexual violence; most, limiting it to rape. The Rome Statute currently provides the most comprehensive

definition of sexual violence which could inspire all law reform in ICGLR countries.

2. **Enhancing the capacity to investigate:** Sexual violence is a complex crime. It is surrounded with silence due to stigma and rejection by the community. It therefore requires adequate tools and techniques to document the crime, preserve the evidence and build cases for prosecution.
3. **Military justice investigation and prosecution is key:** in many contexts, armed forces are among the main perpetrators of sexual violence crimes. Ensuring that the military justice officials' capacity is strengthened, and that there is cooperation between military commanders and justice officials will be paramount in addressing sexual violence. Trough command orders, signing of undertakings, revision of codes of conduct to include the prohibition of sexual violence is paramount.
4. **Witness and victims protection:** Ensuring that victims and witnesses are safe, will result in more victims coming forward to report cases and to testify in court. Protection efforts should also include investigators, human rights defenders, judges, prosecutor, and even doctors who handle sexual violence crimes.
5. **Reparation for survivors:** Most survivors have not received the reparations that they deserve. In a number of countries such as the DRC, efforts are currently made to pay the compensations decided by the judges, while in countries such as Guinea, some

victims' families have called for the Government to assist locate the mass graves (for victims of the mass rapes on 2009) and ensure dignified burial as part of reparations.

6. **South-South Experience sharing and cooperation:** We have noted the importance of experience sharing among countries in the global south faced with sexual violence challenges. Exchanges between Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire have helped the Ivorians to develop an action plan on address sexual violence crimes that were committed in the post-electoral crimes in 2001/2011.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to emphasise on the issue of experience sharing and underscore that some countries have indeed developed tools and institutional arrangements that could be of high important to others in the Great Lakes region. While I could introduce you to my Team's support to specialized investigation or prosecution cells or units in a number of countries, **your presence in Kampala** this week, could be an opportunity to learn from your fellows, for example **how Uganda built its International Crimes Unit**, which as you know has an extensive experience in investigating and hearing cases of serious international crimes, including sexual violence, as a good practice that can be used elsewhere in the region.

I am certain that at the end of this symposium, you will agree with me that we can address impunity for sexual violence crimes in

the Great Lakes Region, only if the capacity of actors in the penal chain, from the police, to the prosecutor, the judge, as well as other actors who contribute to accountability efforts such as doctors, is strengthened. It is only by doing so that we can materialize the political will and commitment made by the Heads of States of the ICGLR, when they signed the Kampala Declaration on addressing sexual violence in December 2011.

Let me finish by reiterating the continued cooperation and support of the UN Team of Experts and the Office of the SRSG on SVC to the ICGLR and its Member States in building a region without sexual violence.

We look forward to learning from your experiences and challenges in addressing sexual violence.

I thank you.

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