



**Natalie Dormer Remarks at World Humanitarian Day event**  
**UN Headquarters, New York, New York, 19 August 2016**

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good evening. It is a privilege to be here with you tonight to talk about what needs to be done to achieve gender equality, to empower women and girls in crises and to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence.

Women and children form the vast majority of the world's 130 million crisis-affected people, yet are still strikingly under-represented in decision-making processes that shape humanitarian action.

Crisis hit women and girls differently and often disproportionately to men and boys largely because they heighten the pre-existing discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion that pervade society.

This means that when a crisis hits, girls are far more likely to be denied access to schooling than boys, putting them at a greater risk of exploitation including child labour and forced early marriage.

It means that women and girls in countries with poor access to reproductive and sexual health care, face even worse odds in accessing the services they need.

It means women and girls face a heightened risk of sexual and gender based violence, with devastating impacts on their and their families' physical, mental and socio-economic status.

When violence and natural disasters displace communities, every move that a woman or girl makes can bring the risk of assault: at a border crossing, checkpoint, when collecting water or firewood, or even in the very camps or settlements where they seek refuge.

Of course we must acknowledge that young men and boys can fall victim to sexual violence and horrific exploitation too but in most of the conflicts around the world, rape has become a weapon of war with women and girls directly targeted by fighting parties.

Take the case of South Sudan today, where rape and gang-rape is being used on a mass scale as a war tactic and instrument of terror in what can only amount to crimes against humanity.

It is our duty, as an international community, to protect women and girls from such abuses.

In rare instances, UN peacekeepers have been implicated in abuses. The UN has a zero tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse and the peacekeeping department is working with troop-contributing states to do better in vetting and the training of troops, investigations and disciplinary action, but each of these cases is an important reminder that we must all remain vigilant to spot and stamp out abuse wherever we see it. We cannot allow the acts of a few to undermine the dedicated work of the vast majority.

But even in the midst of these challenges, women and girls play a vital leadership role in their communities and in shaping humanitarian response. They are first responders in Yemen, they shelter the displaced in Niger, they coordinate aid deliveries in Nepal, they protect each other from abuse in Central African Republic, and the world over, they literally keep crisis-affected communities going as they care for their children, the sick and the elderly.

**I am here because I want a world where women and girls are free to live their lives without the threat of sexual and gender-based violence and where perpetrators of sexual violence do not get away with their crimes.**

**I am here because I want to see a world where crisis-affected girls and women can access the schooling, reproductive health and counselling services that they need to live healthy productive lives.**

**I am here because I want a world where women and girls can take on leadership roles to shape change on the issues that affect them most.**

We know that programmes are most effective when women and girls have access to medical, legal and psychosocial services. When we work with the judicial authorities to investigate and punish perpetrators. When we make reporting simple and efficient to reduce stigma. When we raise awareness across communities – in schools, places of worship, the workplace and in the media. And importantly when we engage men and boys in the conversation. We are, after all, male and female together a team, one species, one Humanity.

At the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul global leaders committed to build on these collective efforts. I'm calling those leaders, who will meet here at the UN General Assembly in September, to fully implement the gender commitments made at the Summit and to make the participation and protection of women the norm in all humanitarian action.

Only by empowering women to take on leadership roles at the national, regional and international levels, will we achieve the change we so desperately need.

Pledges are one thing, action is another. Leaders, it is time for action. Women and girls around the world are watching. They deserve and need your help. We have no time to lose.