**International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims**

**24 March 2018**

**Statement by Dubravka Šimonović, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences**

Every 24 March, the United Nations marks the International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims. Introduced by the UN General Assembly in 2010, it honors the memory of victims of gross and systematic human rights violations and promotes the importance of the right to truth and justice.

As the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, today, I would like to pay special tribute to the courageous struggle of survivors of sexual and gender based violence. My mandate has addressed the issue of reparation for survivors of sexual and gender based violence over the years and through thematic reports, communications on cases and during country visits.

In recent years, my mandate has documented an alarming number of cases of women, and to a lesser extent men and children, who had suffered rape, gang rape and other forms of sexual and gender based violence by security agents, civilians or organized militias, in the context of elections.

These victims go through indescribable trauma. Many suffered health problems, had their education interrupted, developed debilitating conditions, and were subject to stigma. Some women survivors had to cope with unwanted pregnancies. They have displayed monumental courage and determination to get back on their feet. Yet, in many places of the world, survivors do not receive reparation, nor justice. This is not acceptable.

Member States of the UN are required under international human rights law to make available adequate, effective, prompt and appropriate remedies, including reparation, to victims of human rights violations. The latter include compensation, medical care and guarantees of non-repetition. Reparation programs provide concrete support to victims and help restore public trust in the State. I call for reparations to be transformative and I encourage the implementation of a gender sensitive approach, which does not entrench pre-existing patterns of gender-based discrimination and which ensures meaningful participation and consultation of victims in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of reparations.

Let me stress the importance of the inclusion of guarantees of non-repetition, especially in the context of elections when very strict and clear safeguards against human rights violations should be put in place by States. Governments have a duty to ensure its security agencies refrain from engaging in violence against women and must exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women whether those acts are perpetrated by the State, by private persons or by armed groups.

We must break the cycle of elections and violence against women and girls that has been perpetuated in recent elections in many parts of the globe. This requires first and foremost acknowledgment that something went wrong and must be fixed.

I urge every government to investigate incidents of sexual and gender based violence. I urge thorough and proactive judicial investigations, but caution that these should not become an arduous and emotionally exhausting experience for victims. Victims deserve respect and cannot continue to be let down. I call for full cooperation by police and security agencies in order to identify those responsible, including at the command level. Prevention starts with accountability and there is no shortcut. Impunity emboldens perpetrators and perpetuates violence.

I commit to continue speaking out for transformative reparations for victims of sexual and gender based violence in every country of the world. I firmly reaffirm my commitment to work with governments, victims, and civil society to pursue justice and reparations for women and girls as well as other victims of gross human rights violations in the context of elections and beyond.