

## Groundbreaking decision by UN Treaty Body for Survivors of Conflict Related Sexual Violence

Geneva, 18 June 2024

A groundbreaking decision has been made this week by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to protect the identities of 35 South Sudanese survivors of conflict-related sexual violence who have brought a complaint against their State. This is the first time that a UN Treaty Body has agreed to transmit a communication to a State without disclosing to it the identities of the victims. Victims of conflict-related sexual violence rarely make complaints against their States out of fear of reprisals - this decision opens the door for survivors around the world to seek justice.

### Background

The 35 women and girls were subjected to brutal sexual violence, including gang rape and sexual slavery, and other atrocities, including seeing their children killed in front of them. The survivors state that the South Sudanese army was responsible. They want the State to acknowledge what happened to them and for these crimes never to be committed again. They have fought bravely for more than six years for justice for themselves, their families and all survivors of sexual violence in South Sudan. Protecting the identity of survivors is a crucial step in the path to justice.

**Hala** (pseudonym), was just 14 years old at the time, *“They tied my mouth and eyes and ripped my clothes. Then they raped me. If they know (our names) we will not be safe, they will look for us, they will follow us until they find us.”*

**Sarah** (pseudonym), recalled, *“They said they were going to kill us but one of them said “no, let us just rape them.”*

The survivors are all represented by Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) with the support of Paxus LLP and global law firm A&O Shearman via its pro bono program.

*“This is a great step forward for all survivors of conflict related sexual violence in seeking justice and accountability. In particular, we applaud the bravery of South Sudanese women who had the courage to tirelessly fight for their rights. And we applaud CEDAW’s decision to protect their identity and open the path to justice, the first UN Treaty Body to take this step”,* said Antonia Mulvey, Executive Director of LAW. *“We look forward to South Sudan’s engagement in this process, a step which can pave the way for reconciliation and a new chapter for the country.”*

*Notes to editors:* LAW promotes a survivor-centered approach of justice to ensure those who are brave enough to report on the violation suffered can access it safely. LAW supports survivors to work together, by facilitating and hosting safe spaces for them to meet and share their experiences regardless of whether they are engaging in the justice system or not. See: [www.legalactionworldwide.org](http://www.legalactionworldwide.org)

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