



## International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

### Statement by Legal Action Worldwide

#### **Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) calls for comprehensive approach to end conflict-related sexual violence in Somalia**

**19 June 2023, Mogadishu, Somalia:** *“Those of you who are sexually assaulted, do not remain silent. You can now seek justice like me, we have been silenced for far too long and we were told that it was taboo to talk about what happened to us, most of us have cried in secrecy and in silence, it is time to break the silence.”* The words of Fatima, one of the survivors resonate through camps as she advocates for justice.

Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) calls for urgent action by Somali authorities and the international community to take all measures to prevent and effectively address the conflict-related sexual violence in Somalia. LAW acknowledges the efforts of the Somali government and local civil society organisations in combating sexual violence. However, a comprehensive and coordinated domestic and international response is imperative to address the root causes and ensure justice and support for survivors.

Recent reports have revealed alarming levels of sexual and gender based violence in Somalia, primarily targeting women, girls, and marginalised groups. These horrific acts are a direct consequence of the ongoing armed conflict, prevailing impunity, gender inequality, successive humanitarian crises and the breakdown of law and order.

The statistics present a chilling reality: Since 2017 Legal Action Worldwide operating in 6 internally displaced camps in and around Mogadishu received a more than 1600 complaints, 75% were related to incidents of gender-based violence, a significant number of which occur in conflict settings. In 2022 the United Nations reported 340 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, primarily attributed to clan militias and Al-Shabaab. Rape and attempted rape were the most frequently reported forms of sexual violence. Reports of sexual violence increased significantly compared with the previous reporting period, fueled by intensified clashes and are most probably under reported.

LAW places survivors at the heart of its concerns and emphasises the need for immediate action to combat the devastating impact of sexual violence on individuals and communities. At their request, Somali authorities must, and the international community must support initiatives which:

1. Urgently pass the Sexual Offences Bill (SOB) and strengthen other national legal frameworks, to effectively address conflict-related sexual violence, ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable, and survivors have access to justice.
2. Support survivor and community-led initiatives to combat conflict related sexual violence and empower individuals to report cases of conflict related sexual violence, challenge harmful gender norms, and promote gender equality. Amina Osman, a member of LAW’s community champions’ network stated *“You established the Hiil-Haween (Helping Women) network for us, taught us about the various types of violence against women and children, their rights, the causes or contributors to the various types*

*of GBV, how to reduce or combat it, how to report it when these incidents occur, and much more. We thank you for training and teaching us about all these issues that we were previously unaware of. Second, we would not report abuses even when we saw them, but now if we have any problems or see any violations, we share them with the organisation and report them. We now believe it and act on it. And we appreciate your assistance.”*

3. Allocate increased funding for programs that offer comprehensive medical, psychosocial, and legal support to survivors of sexual violence, with a particular focus on building the capacity of local organisations.
4. Strengthen child protection mechanisms to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children, including the provision of specialised services and access to quality education.

By amplifying the voices and experiences of survivors, we can forge a future free from the scourge of sexual violence, where justice and accountability prevail.



*Amina Osman, a member of LAW's community champions' network, Hiil-Haween (Helping Women), sharing feedback and her experience with fellow IDPs and LAW's paralegals.*