

**Tekst van het statement van Vrouwenvertegenwoordiger Margriet van der Linden, uitgesproken op 13 oktober 2014 in de Algemene Vergadering van de Verenigde Naties**

'Don't cycle too close to the cornfield!' my grandmother used to warn me when I was little. I was seven and didn't understand why. Years later I heard that girls had been sexually assaulted there.

One in three women worldwide experience to some form of sexual violence. As The Netherlands Women's Representative to the United Nations, I've spoken to many women about their experiences over the past year. A female CEO told me that she'd been abused by a family friend when she was little. She'd never talked about it because she thought it was her fault. A student assumed the same when she was assaulted after a party. 'I shouldn't have been cycling at that time of night,' another woman concluded after she was attacked on the way home from a meeting.

What stands out in each case is how vulnerable women are when they are abused. Vulnerable when they are struggling to come to terms with the violence. Vulnerable when they are suffering depression as a result. Vulnerable in their social isolation. Vulnerable because of what it's done to their body. And vulnerable from blaming themselves or being made to feel guilty. With the use and abuse of passages from holy books. Ideas imposed by a small group of power mongers in social or religious communities. Ideas that are assimilated by millions of followers worldwide who see it as their right to assault and rape women and girls. Or taunt them with explicit remarks, noises or gestures – all expressions of sexism that women around the world face on a daily basis. Alarming, sexual violence and sexism are growing in parts of the world where women are advancing.

The world has been shocked by the violent acts committed by IS. Much of this extreme – often sexual – violence is directed at women and girls. It's understandable that the brutal

killings of Western journalists and aid workers make the headlines. But it's alarming that extreme sexual violence on such a wide scale seems to be drawing less attention.

In October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1325, acknowledging the vulnerability of women in armed conflicts and – in theory – drawing international attention to violence against them. We thought we had made progress. But in this conflict, resolution 1325 hasn't even been mentioned, let alone been considered when deciding on an international response. Despite the resolution, the plight of women has never prompted international intervention. But why not? Are human rights violations not important enough if the victims are women?

We've all heard the news coming out of Syria – the accounts of brutal violence told by women, girls and children in the countless refugee camps on the borders of Turkey and Jordan. This is happening before the eyes of the world, and the consequences are disastrous. We're aware of what's going on and some of us are trying to do something about it. But these are all small ripples in an endless ocean of violence. And what about involving women in resolving conflicts? Don't they matter?

Eighteen months ago, the World Health Organization urged governments and other parties to place sexual violence against women and girls high on their agendas. The physical and mental health of whole societies, generations and population groups was at stake. Serious and sustained action was needed. The WHO was sounding the alarm. But still sexual violence only causes the occasional stir. Like when a report was published earlier this year about sexual violence in the European Union. It emerged that even in the Netherlands one in three women have been exposed to violence of this kind. In fact, the number is probably even higher because not all women report it.

The women and children who have fallen into the hands of IS and whose fate is in the balance have a right to report these crimes and a right to justice. As do the women and girls in the refugee camps, the schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram, the Indian girl on the bus on

the way to school and the lesbians in Africa subjected to so-called corrective rape. The hundreds and thousands of girls who are forced to undergo genital mutilation, and the girls who are forced into marriage at a young age and forced into sex by their husbands. For their sake, governments and the international community need to take serious and sustained action by publicly condemning this epidemic violation of human rights.

We can start by improving the position of women and doing more to educate boys. Sexual violence is just as much a boys' and men's problem. They have to be taught that their position and masculinity will not be at stake if they treat women and girls with respect, if they give their daughters opportunities and allow them the status that they themselves feel naturally entitled to.

No woman or girl should be made to feel like a second-class citizen, or an object to be used and then tossed aside. And no man or boy should be made to believe that this is the norm on the basis of culture, religion, theory, habit, a joke or a misappropriated text. This is a job for the international community and national governments.

In the year ahead there will be extra attention for the post-2015 agenda. But I'm sad to say that securing the rights and position of women and girls is a constant battle. Women's issues are too easily forgotten or put at the bottom of the pile.

In Yemen it was said of Nobel Peace Prize Winner Tawakkol Karman: 'The voice of one woman is like a revolution'. Let those voices be heard in meetings and assemblies. Let them be heard in the mountains of Iraq and the buses of India.

In my unique role as women's representative to the UN, I want to make a moral appeal to the political, economic, religious and spiritual leaders of this world: it is unacceptable that one in three women are victims of sexual violence. Don't allow your silence to say to women and girls that you aren't interested in protecting their rights. Use your leadership to stop the violence.

Your rights are their rights.

Their life is our life.

Thank you.