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**Opening Remarks by
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**The 1st International Conference on
"Action with Women and Peace"
2 July 2019**

**Dr. Denis Mukwege, Minister Retno, SRSG Pramila Patten,
Former High Commissioner Zeid Al-Hussein, distinguished
guest, ladies and gentlemen,**

**It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to the 1st
International Conference on "Action with Women and Peace",
my government's initiative to more actively contribute to the
global women, peace and security agenda.**

**Next year will mark the 20th Anniversary of Resolution 1325
of the United Nations Security Council. Since its adoption in
2000, much progress has been made in the global response to
sexual violence in conflict. Awareness has been raised about
the link between sexual violence against women and peace
and security, the silence over the issue has been broken in
many parts of the world, and conflict-related sexual violence
has been prosecuted and convicted as a crime under**

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international law.

The Security Council continues to be engaged on the issue, and the adoption of follow-up resolutions to 1325 have further galvanized efforts to fight this scourge. In particular, the adoption of Resolution 1820 in 2009, establishing the mandate of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, was an important milestone. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank the current office holder, Pramila Patten for her tireless work and dedication to fulfilling her mandate.

Today, we also have with us one of the most heroic defenders of victims of sexual violence in conflict, Dr. Denis Mukwege. I am privileged to be able to consider myself a loyal friend and supporter of Dr. Mukwege. I was very sad, therefore, to miss his first visit to Korea in 2016 when he was awarded the Seoul Peace Prize. So I am delighted that he has accepted our invitation to come back this time to lend his support and authority to this conference.

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. Mukwege and Ms. Nadia Murad last year was in recognition of their indomitable courage and abiding dedication in support of the victims and survivors of sexual violence in conflict. It has also enhanced public awareness of the issue, and rekindled advocacy and activism to eliminate this most pernicious form

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of human rights abuse. It has also thrown light on the great distance ahead in achieving that goal.

Despite all the progress, the crime of sexual violence is persistent in today's conflict zones. The normative frameworks have advanced during the last two decades, but the gap between the norm and the reality on the ground remains wide and deep, as clearly laid out in this year's report of the UN Secretary-General. Indeed, the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. Mukwege last year was an alarm against complacency and a call to further action.

It was in this sense of renewed resolve that my government launched the Initiative of "Action with Women and Peace" last year. As a country that saw many young girls and women fall victim as so-called "comfort women" during the Second World War, we still grapple with their pain and suffering, and we empathize profoundly with victims of conflict-related sexual violence wherever it takes place.

Based on our historical experience, the Korean Government has been actively participating in global efforts to advance the agenda of Women, Peace and Security. The "Action with Women and Peace" Initiative concretely translates our commitment into action.

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There are two pillars to this Initiative. One is to support humanitarian and development projects that target women and girls in conflict situations, and the other is to provide a platform in this region to advance the global discourse on the many challenges tied to the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including conflict-related sexual violence. This Conference marks the official launch of such a platform. I am very confident that during the next two days, the conference will prove to be a vibrant and rich launching pad for the platform.

Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends,

Before we start our discussion, I would like to share some points that I consider to be priority considerations as we explore the way forward.

First, I would like to underscore the importance of prevention.

As with all threats to human rights as well as peaceful societies, it is much better to prevent than to respond to sexual violence in conflict or in peaceful times. The key in prevention is addressing the root causes, which is invariably, though in different forms and varying degrees, structural discrimination against women and gender inequality. Combatting gender-based discrimination before, during and

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after conflicts should always be a part of our work on conflict-related sexual violence.

Effective and meaningful participation of women in discussion and decision-making over political, economic and social issues during the entire peace process, including peace-making and post-conflict reconstruction, is also instrumental. The voice of women should be made stronger in supporting survivors and ensuring accountability.

The Korean Government has been making continuous efforts to expand the participation of women in national defense and peace and security policies. In 2014, we adopted a National Action Plan for the implementation of 1325. We also announced several commitments at the High Level Side Event on the occasion of the Security Council Open Debate last April. Among others, we committed to ensuring women's increased participation and greater gender equality in our peacekeeping operations, and enhancing women's representation in the peace-related functions of the government. We are determined to make further progress in this field.

Second, the victim- and survivor-centered approach, as spelled out in Resolution 2467, should guide all of our efforts.

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This is crucial not just for sustainable solutions but also for the prevention of secondary trauma or re-victimization. The survivor-centered approach should be integrated into all policies and programs to support and meet the needs and demands of the survivors in post-conflict situations. This has been our approach in supporting Rohingya refugee women through UNFPA and UNICEF. Starting this year, we will be also helping survivors in the Central African Republic.

Back in October 2010, a High-level Panel appointed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on Remedies and Reparations for Victims of Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo conducted in-country work. As Chair of Panel at the time, I had the chance to meet many survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in eastern DRC. Their recollection of the horrendous violence they had been subjected to, as well as the social stigma, isolation and physical and psychological pains they were suffering in the aftermath were extraordinary. But it turns out that their terrible ordeal is not extraordinary but repeated and perpetuated in many conflict zones, as if they were ordinary. Listening, really listening to the voices of the survivors should be the starting point in all our efforts.

This afternoon, we will have such a chance to listen, at a session on “Ensuring a Survivor-Centered Approach.”

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Listening, of course, would have little meaning beyond commiseration unless it is translated into action. It is therefore with great appreciation that we have carefully followed the initiative of Dr. Mukwege and his foundation to establish the International Survivor's Fund. I very much hope that the Fund will be established and become an indispensable tool that changes the lives of survivors much for the better.

The significance of the victim-centered approach has also been underlined by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination last year with regard to the issue of "comfort women." My government has humbly acknowledged that previous efforts on this issue had been grossly lacking in this regard, and we have committed to the victim-centered approach in support of the survivors' aspiration for justice based upon historical truth. The Korean Government will continue to heed their voices and do as much as we can in restoring their dignity and honor, and to ensure that current and future generations learn from the past.

Third, the role and participation of civil society must be further encouraged.

Civil society groups on the ground play a crucial role in preventing the outbreak of violence by sounding

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early-warning alarms and helping survivors overcome their trauma. They have also helped to identify and overcome various challenges and barriers in running programs to support the survivors.

In recognition of civil society's key role, we established an Advisory Committee when we launched the "Action with Women and Peace" Initiative. The Advisory Committee is comprised of experts and advocates with various backgrounds in the field of gender and human rights, and is tasked with providing advice on the implementation of the Initiative. I am very grateful to each and every member of the Advisory Committee, whose views have been invaluable in preparing for this conference. They will continue to be our sounding board and partner as we build upon the outcome of the Conference.

Last but not least, we need to make sustained efforts to pursue accountability.

Lack of accountability breeds impunity, which fuels further violence and discourages survivors from seeking justice. Once settled in, the culture of impunity is extremely difficult to dismantle. But we must try with every case. Providing a safe environment for victims to report the crimes is a first step. To this end, it is important to dispel the social stigma

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and discrimination against survivors. At the global level, countries during and after conflict should be supported in strengthening their judicial system and advancing the rule of law, as well as in capacity building and training for law-enforcement personnel.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues,

I have no illusion about the challenges we are facing. I don't think any of us do. Indeed, in an atmosphere of an overall decline in the commitment to human rights protection and intractable conflicts in many corners of the world, it is easy to lose hope that we will ever see the day when conflicts are wisely prevented and will be free of a spike in sexual violence and the temptation of the warring parties to exploit it as a tool of warfare.

However, we also see the momentum for positive change brought about by the recent me-too movement in so many countries, including mine. Will the shrinking space for violence against women and girls in peaceful contexts lead to the same in conflict and other crisis situations? Perhaps the answer is not so straight forward, and would depend case by case. But let us keep up the hope and the resolve, working with our leading advocates such as Dr. Mukwege and SRSR Patten, and the former High Commissioner, to usher in the

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day when women are not destroyed as victims of terrible violence but lead as peace-makers and builders.

Once again, thank you all for coming to share your stories and insights. I wish everyone fruitful and engaging discussions. Thank you. /End/