

Sexual Violence in War – Fact Sheet

Sexual violence in armed conflict is widespread, strategic, and a systematic tool of war that effect both girls, boys, women and men. Rape is “biological warfare” that physically and psychologically affects the victim and their communities.¹

“Violence against women during or after armed conflicts has been reported in EVERY international or non-international war-zone.”²

RAPE IS A WEAPON OF WAR:

- Rape as a weapon is intended to humiliate, dehumanize and control and dominate women, their families and their communities.
- Rape is used as a tool for "ethnic cleansing" or genocide. Women and girls may be targets of sexual violence because they are members of a particular ethnic, national, or religious group.³
- Sexual violence has deep socio-economic implications inhibiting women's workforce participation and girls' school attendance.
- Rape can cause permanent damage such as irreparable fistula* and infertility which could intern ostracizes women from their own communities.
- Being raped or labeled a “rebel wife” or “child of the enemy” can also result in lifelong social ostracism and neglect.
- Rape camps where women and girls are sexual slaves are used as weapons for spreading terror.⁴
- Girls and Women in refugee camps who are unaccompanied by men can be regarded as sexual property and face forced prostitution in exchange for survival, such as food, documents or even refugee status.⁵
- Men and boys are also exposed to rape and other forms of sexual violence, it is used as an instrument of terror and group punishment, an expression of ethnic hatred and humiliation, and is used to emasculate and shatter leadership structures.⁶

“It is often invisible: the world does not witness rape in the same way as landmine injuries. Cheaper than bullets, it requires no weapons system other than physical intimidation, making it low cost, yet high impact.”¹

“It is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in a modern conflict.” - Gen.

Patrick Cammaert, 2008.

Women who have been raped in the context of war may feel shame and fear rejection from their husbands, families, and communities if they report having been raped. Threats of divorce or the possibility of being considered "unmarriageable" causes many women's reluctance to report their experiences. The economic and social dependence of women on men in many societies contributes to their fear of reporting rape.⁷

“The recurrent use of sexual violence is arguably one of the worst global protection challenges due to its scale, prevalence and profound impact.” - USG Jan Egeland, 2005

*Traumatic fistulas occur when tissues are ruptured during violent rape, leaving passages that constantly leak urine or feces or both.

¹ UNIFEM, [Addressing Conflict Related Sexual Violence an Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practice](#), 2010.

² UNIFEM, [Facts and Figures on Violence Against Women, Crimes against Women in Situations of Armed Conflict](#)

³ Amnesty International, [Rape as a Tool of War: A Fact Sheet](#), 2007.

⁴ Amnesty International, [Rape as a Tool of War: A Fact Sheet](#), 2007.

⁵ Amnesty International, [Rape as a Tool of War: A Fact Sheet](#), 2007.

⁶ UNIFEM, [Addressing Conflict Related Sexual Violence an Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practice](#), 2010.

⁷ Amnesty International, [Rape as a Tool of War: A Fact Sheet](#), 2007.

Facts and Figures

- During the 14-year conflict in Liberia, an estimated 40 per cent of the population was affected by sexual violence.⁸
- UNFPA reports that 80% of the 5,000 male inmates held at a concentration camp in Sarajevo Canton reported being raped.⁹
- In Rwanda, up to half a million women were raped during the 1994 genocide.¹⁰
- An average of 40 women are raped every day in South Kivu in the context of the on-going armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.¹¹
- It is estimated that between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s.¹²
- It is estimated that between 50,000 and 64,000 internally displaced women in Sierra Leone have experienced sexual violence at the hands of armed combatants.¹³

International Law – Crimes Against Humanity

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is governed by the Rome Statute and is the first permanent, treaty based, international criminal court established to help end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community.¹⁴ The ICC acknowledges rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, "or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity" as crime against humanity if the action is part of a widespread or systematic practice.

In 1996 the United Nations tribunal indicted eight Bosnian Serb military and police officers with the rape of Muslim women in the Bosnian war, marking this as the first time sexual assault was treated separately as a war crime.¹⁵

"The extreme violence that women suffer during conflict does not arise solely out of the conditions of war; it is directly related to the violence that exists in women's lives during peacetime." –Women War Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment, UNIFEM 2002

⁸ Swiss, S. et al. (1998) "[Violence against women during the Liberian civil conflict](#)", *Journal of the American Medical Association* 279, 625–629.

⁹ UNIFEM, [Addressing Conflict Related Sexual Violence an Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practice](#), 2010.

¹⁰ UNIFEM, [Facts and Figures on Violence Against Women, Crimes against Women in Situations of Armed Conflict](#)

¹¹ Rodriguez, Claudia, '[Sexual Violence in South Kivu](#)' *Forced Migration Review* (2007) (27) 45

¹² Ward, Jeanne on behalf of the RHRC, '[Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)' *If Not Now, When?: Addressing Gender-based Violence in Refugee, Internally Displaced, and Post-Conflict Settings* (2002) 81.

¹³ Physicians for Human Rights, 'Executive Summary' [War-Related Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone: A Population-based Assessment](#) (2002) 3.

¹⁴ International Criminal Court – [About the Court](#)

¹⁵ New York Times, [For First Time, Court Defines Rape as War Crime](#), 1996