

Rape as a weapon

CARE International UK : Voices against Violence



CARE International 2008/Kate Holt

Every day, the lives of women and girls are being destroyed by sexual violence. Used as a tactic of war to terrorise communities, with devastating effect, rape is the hidden reality of conflict.

The UN Security Council has committed to tackle this violence before, during and after conflict, and to help the women and girls left to deal with the consequences.

We challenge them to make this commitment a reality.

1. Rape as a weapon

Throughout history, violence against women and girls has been an integral part of armed conflict. They are killed, injured, widowed and orphaned. Rape has been used by fighting forces as a tactic of war to humiliate, intimidate and traumatise communities, and as a method of ethnic cleansing. Women and girls are abducted into sexual slavery or forced to exchange sex or marriage for survival.

The statistics are stark, up to **50,000** women were raped in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and up to **500,000** during the Rwanda genocide. Horrifyingly, still, **40** women are brutally raped each day in just one province of Democratic Republic of Congo.

It is not just women who bear the scars of sexual violence, it holds entire communities hostage. Women cannot safely leave their homes to access water points or markets, children and teachers cannot safely get to school. Reprisals fuel further conflict, and often as the climate descends into general lawlessness, opportunistic rape by civilians becomes a normal part of life.

Survivors continue to experience physical injuries, psychological trauma, social stigma, and STDs including HIV/AIDS, long after the conflict has ended. Children conceived from rape are often rejected or discriminated against.

Despite the recognition of the impact of armed conflict on women, the protection of women and girls from sexual violence and the care and support for women survivors are often woefully inadequate. Their access to protection, services and legal redress is limited by continuing violence, poverty, cultural and social stigma, and impunity.

Key Recommendations to United Nations Security Council

- **Better co-ordination** of UN efforts to tackle sexual violence
- **Better services** for survivors, such as healthcare and longer-term aid for putting their lives back together
- **Better prevention** through addressing the underlying causes of violence
- **Better data collection** towards ensuring a timely and adequate response to the needs of women exposed to violence

Marie-Claire's story, Democratic Republic of Congo

'The mai-mai surrounded my house. They took my children and threatened to kill my husband. They stripped and sexually assaulted my husband, four of them raped me, and then they stabbed and killed my son in law, cutting off his genitals. They raped me again with a stick in front of my husband and children. He pleaded with them to kill him. Then they raped my children next to my son in law's dead body.

'They took my daughter and kept her in the forest for 2 years. Her fiancé has rejected her because she was raped by the mai-mai, and now her children rely on me for financial support.'

2. Ending sexual violence in conflict

In June 2008, the United Nations took a major step by adopting Security Council Resolution 1820 which commits them to address sexual violence during and after conflict. But the key to meeting this commitment will be the implementation of the resolution. How this will be done is under discussion by the UN. So far this process has focused on security and impunity – important issues – but neglected key issues of ensuring the health, safety and dignity of survivors. The current focus reflects the priorities of diplomatic debates at international level, but must also centre on the rights and needs of women who live with the reality of armed conflict.

Drawing on our work in conflict zones worldwide, CARE has identified four key challenges which the UN must acknowledge and overcome to meet its commitment to end sexual violence.

2.1 Better Coordination

UN efforts to address sexual violence have been consistently undermined by weak coordination, resulting in duplications and gaps in efforts between different agencies. This reflects a lack of political attention, expertise and human and financial resources. Too often, UN staff working on gender based violence are either senior managers at UN headquarters, with no resources or staff, or junior staff in the field with little influence on decision-making.

A Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on Women, Peace and Security should be established for three years to provide leadership for coordination efforts at headquarters level. It should report directly to the UN Secretary General with the mandate to convene all UN agencies involved in responding to gender-based violence and lead them in systemic UN reform. **UN Action, a group of 12 UN agencies, should be strengthened to address UN system incoherence and a robust evaluation system introduced.** In the longer-term, the proposed new UN entity on women's

Voices against Violence

issues should place gender based violence prevention and response as a top priority. **All too often lessons are identified in evaluations but not translated into change for women.**

Agencies responsible for coordination on the ground in the midst of conflict must maintain neutrality, independence and a credible humanitarian mandate. This will give agencies working directly with people affected by sexual violence on all sides of a conflict the confidence to work with them.

2.2 Better Services

Sexual violence impacts on all aspects of life, yet political debates have focused narrowly on security and justice, neglecting the vital importance of basic health, psycho-social and livelihoods support for survivors.

Successful prosecution depends on sound data, and particularly in sexual and violent crimes, medical evidence is essential. Reliable data can only be obtained when social systems are in place that survivors trust enough to report accurately their experiences. Services such as healthcare fill this role, providing initial support to survivors and a trusted forum to report their experiences.

Without major investments in basic services, survivors are unlikely to report crimes, let alone sustain the daunting fight for justice, and any security sector reforms will fail to translate into either better prevention or response to violence against women.

Governments and the UN must ensure that **basic health, psycho-social support, security for prevention and response, and livelihoods programmes are part of the response to sexual violence.** To ensure efforts are accepted and sustainable, these should be part of wider humanitarian and recovery programmes. Rather than stand alone projects, the stigma associated with gender based violence means that it is best handled sensitively and integrated into wider work with the community. The **UN guidelines for handling gender based violence must be turned from theory into practice,** with enforced adherence to agreed standards.

To prevent the resurgence of sexual violence after a conflict **funds must be made available beyond the initial emergency response to ensure gender based violence work is integrated into programmes helping people recover from conflict.** Donor governments and institutions need to sustain funding for frontline programmes in the longer term. Too often funding dries up when the emergency is declared over.

2.3 Better Prevention

Our experience and field research shows that more can be done before, during and after conflict, to address the under-lying social, cultural and political drivers of sexual violence.

Voices against Violence

Long-term commitment is required to change attitudes and behaviours that condone violence against women and girls. Ultimately, one of the most important ways of preventing gender based violence is by empowering women. But more can also be done to prevent abuses in the midst of active conflict.

Experience shows that women most often turn to other women when exposed to sexual violence. Discussions on Resolution 1820 must **decide a realistic and time-bound process to increase the numbers of female military and police officers, and civilian UN staff, trained in gender based violence prevention and response.** The general **continued lack of international police that can be deployed in a timely and adequate fashion must also be addressed.**

Women caught up in conflict are often at higher risk of assault when they are displaced. Too often, military peacekeepers are deployed to maintain perimeter security outside camps for displaced people, or along transport routes. International forces, both police and military, need the mandate, training and capabilities to intervene in security matters inside camps.

Donor governments and institutions should make funds available to strengthen complaints mechanisms which can aid early warning and response to gender based violence cases. Priority must be on safe and confidential access to such mechanisms for women.

2.4 Better Data Collection

All too often, the international response to violence against women has been delayed due to lengthy deliberations over measuring its extent. CARE believes the debate on monitoring and data collection needs to shift so that action is no longer too little, too late. The **overarching objective for monitoring and data collection should be to ensure a timely and adequate response to women who survive violence.** Priority should be given to systems enabling action on the ground, rather than informing debates on conflicts at the international level.

Efforts to gather data about women's experiences must also ensure greater respect of ethics and confidentiality; building on existing, but poorly disseminated, guidelines. People provide data at great risk to themselves on the understanding that action will be taken to address their concerns in a timely fashion. Survivors, their family, communities and the collector of information must all have the confidence that such information is compiled, stored and used in a safe and confidential manner, with no possibility of tracing information back to its source. **Data collection staff should be trained in psycho-social care and able to refer survivors to basic health and livelihoods assistance.**

3. Overcoming the Challenges

Tackling war-related sexual violence is a relatively new area of humanitarian practice, and as with any Resolution on the UN Security Council agenda, the difficulty will come in the implementation.

Each day that the UN discusses how to go about this, the lives of women, girls and communities are being destroyed by sexual violence. We challenge the Security Council to live up to its commitment to them by adopting these essential reforms in co-ordination, provision of basic services, prevention and data collection. They must set benchmarks, timelines and accountability for implementation, but most of all take clear, decisive and urgent action.

This is our challenge to them.

Marie-Claire's story, Democratic Republic of Congo

Life is better now. Thanks to CARE's support I can express my feelings and begin to forget what I have suffered. With the livelihoods training I am gaining strength. I haven't got as many financial worries as I used to although it is still very difficult to get by. I haven't got a house, but I have bought a piece of land, and can pay the school fees.

Definitions

- Gender based violence: violence against a person on the basis of gender. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, and coercion.
- Sexual violence: while this term often relates to rape, it also encompasses other abuses that include sexual threats, exploitation, humiliation, assault and attempted rape.
- Impunity: the impossibility of bringing perpetrators of human rights violations to justice.

Voices Against Violence is a campaign run by CARE International UK, calling for the protection of all women who live in armed conflict. To add your voice against violence, please visit www.careinternational.org.uk/campaigns.