

Forum: The First General Assembly

Issue: Measures to Combat Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones

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Introduction

“It is my strong belief that when it comes to sexual violence, we cannot expect peace without justice, reparation without recognition, and sustainable development without the full empowerment of those who have suffered sexual violence or are at risk.”

--- Former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

Sexual violence is a distinctive act of destruction during conflicts. While most acts of violence committed by armed groups are well broadcasted, acts of sexual violence such as rape often remain completely hidden. This issue imposes severe negative impacts on societies in conflict zones, and overwhelming consequences on the civilians residing in those countries. It affects people of all races, ages, and genders. In contrary to common misconception, sexual violence not only affects women and girls, but also men and boys. However, certain groups of people are much more vulnerable and exposed toward acts of sexual violence. According to a report by Save the Children, the victims of sexual violence are 70 percent made up of children in certain war-stricken nations. Liberia, still trying to recover from a civil war, is found with more than 80 percent of victims younger than the age of 17. Very often, the stigma associated with sexual violence sticks with the victim, instead of the perpetrator. Survivors of sexual violence often face rejections by their families and communities. Currently, very little data exists in regards to the issue of sexual violence in conflict zones. With the shame that comes with these traumatic experiences, victims rarely ever report the incidences of sexual abuse. Although it has been a recurring feature of most conflicts around the world, member states have only been openly discussing this issue recently. Despite numerous public condemnations and prohibitive legislations, the appalling reality of sexual violence still continues today. For the United Nations to effectively counter this issue in conflict zones, it needs to implement more direct and comprehensive measures that combat the occurrence of such violence and alleviate the effects of its aftermath.

Definition of Key Terms

Sexual violence

Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts directed against a person's sexuality, using violence or coercion acts, by any person regardless of the relationship to the victim.

Conflict zones

A region where a war is taking place; area marked by extreme violence.

Comfort women

Women and girls forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II

Sexual exploitation

Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

Sexual abuse

The actual and threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under coercive conditions.

Background Information

Historical overview

Sexual violence in conflict zones is not a new phenomenon, but global conversations surrounding this topic are very much recent. In earlier times, the limited availability of documentation on sexual violence in conflict zones posed a major challenge. Without a comprehensive set of information, it was difficult to determine the motivations of perpetrators in committing acts of sexual violence, the impact of sexual violence on victims, and the nature of any political impact such acts of violence might have during and after a conflict. Since then, however, the reporting aspect of the issue has greatly improved. With the increased attention given to this particular topic, more and more countries and organizations are acknowledging sexual violence as a significant political weapon during conflicts. The documentations have allowed us to identify major areas around the world where sexual violence is a prominent issue. For

example, the “Rape of Nanking” and the exploitation of “comfort women” during the Second World War gave the world an indication that armies often use systematic sexual violence against civilians.

The Second World War

Acts of sexual violence occurred during the Second World War and its aftermath, but not many historical records exist. This is for a variety of reasons. One of them is that perpetrators of sexual violence were from all sides of the war. Therefore, it was a challenge for any state to accuse others of the crime. Furthermore, sexual violence was long considered an inevitable misfortune for armed conflicts. This belief posed more difficulties for the member states and organizations to discuss this issue openly. However, historians and writers have put in more efforts to investigate about sexual violence during World War II. The international community now recognizes the crimes committed against the large number of Asian women and girls by the Japanese Army. The women and girls were forced to take up the role of military sexual slaves, or “comfort women”. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women has published reports in regards to this issue: “...multiple rape on an everyday basis in the ‘military comfort houses’... Allegedly, soldiers were encouraged by their commanding officers to use the ‘comfort women’ facilities...”

Bangladesh Liberation War (1971)

During the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, between two and four hundred thousand Bangladeshi women were systematically raped by members of the Pakistani military and supporting Islamist militias. The acts of sexual violence caused thousands of pregnancies, birth of war babies, abortions, and suicides. Many women also died of sexually transmitted diseases. Additionally, victims of sexual violence were immediately ostracized from their communities, further breaking down to the stability of society and the well being of civilians. “Apart from little children, all those were sexually matured would be segregated...and then the women would be put in the compound under guard and made available to the troops...Some of the stories they told were appalling. Being raped again and again and again. A lot of them died in those camps”, said Australian doctor Geoffrey Davis, who was sent to Bangladesh by the United Nations and International Planned Parenthood Federation to perform abortion procedures on victims of rape.

The Rwandan Genocide

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Rwanda, Rene Degni-Segui, estimated in his 1996

report that war rape during the Rwandan Genocide resulted between 2,000 and 5,000 pregnancies, and affected between 250,000 and 500,000 women and girls. The report also stated “rape was systematic and was used as a weapon by the perpetrators”. Although there were no explicitly stated written commands found, other evidence suggests that military leaders, such as the generals, encouraged their soldiers to commit rape toward Tutsis women. The Organization of African Unity’s International Panel of Eminent Personalities published a report in 2000, which asserted: “We can be certain that almost all females who survived the genocides were direct victims of rape or other sexual violence, or were profoundly affected by it”. The systematic acts of sexual violence committed during the Rwandan Genocide are different from other conflicts because of its organized nature of propaganda (which fueled the sexual violence), the level of brutality towards the victims, and the public nature of rapes.

Sexual violence committed by peacekeepers

Serious incidents of sexual assault perpetrated by peacekeepers have been documented in numerous regions of the world for many years. This issue is especially severe in African nations, where peacekeeping missions are most focused in. The 1996 study “The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children” conducted by UNICEF reported “in 6 out of 12 country studies, the arrival of peacekeeping troops has been associated with a rapid rise in child prostitution.” A review on the topic concluded eight years later that prostitution and sexual abuse in those nations almost always follow peacekeeping intervention missions. This critical issue within peacekeeping missions has always been difficult to address and tackle. While member states and international organizations generally see the large benefit of these missions and are in favor of its purposes, they are also skeptical of its credibility and effectiveness after seeing the frequency of misconduct. In order to effectively combat sexual assaults and violence committed by peacekeepers, member states of the United Nations must put together a joint effort to ensure that these troops are following international laws in the duration of their missions.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Bangladesh

After the mass raping of Bengali women occurred during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, the Bangladeshi government enacted several groundbreaking reforms in order to alleviate the severe aftermath of the war and prevent these sorts of events from happening in the future. The government publicly regarded the rape victims as *birangonas* (war heroines) to improve their social image and

prevent them from being ostracized. Women had the choice of aborting the child or putting their children up for adoption, which was globally unprecedented in the time period, especially for a Muslim nation. The government also attempted to help these women in finding a husband, and those who did not want to marry were provided with necessary trainings for jobs. However, there were many obstacles during the post-war transition. Despite the government's efforts to "marry off" these rape victims with a loving and supportive spouse, many of these women continue to live with the husbands they had married to when they were raped during the war, while still referred to as "shameful" by members of their community. In 2009, the Bangladeshi government set up a tribunal to try individuals accused of crimes such as wartime rape during 1971.

The Office of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict

In the past few decades, the United Nations has put in strenuous efforts to combat the occurrences of sexual violence in armed conflicts. The Office of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict has set out to "end impunity for sexual violence in conflict by assisting national authorities to strengthen criminal accountability, responsiveness to survivors and judicial capacity", while serving as the United Nation's voice and outlet on the issue. The office was founded by Security Council Resolution 1888 (2009), which recognized the horrific effects of sexual violence on communities and addressed the need to dedicate a specific office in the United Nations for this issue. Quoting Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zainab Hawa Bangura: "Sexual violence in conflict represents a great moral issue of our time and it merits the concerted forces of the Security Council". The office has eight priority countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central African Republic (CAR), Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, South Sudan, and Sudan. While many of the priority countries are in Africa, the office is also engaged in many issue-related affairs in Asia and the Middle East.

UN Women

As an influential UN organization, UN Women has been a key player in the efforts against sexual violence in conflict for the past few decades. UN Women work with member states of the UN to set standards for achieving gender equality, ensuring that the laws, policies, and services in these countries benefit women and girls worldwide with five major focus areas: increasing women's leadership and participation, ending violence against women, engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes, enhancing women's economic empowerment, and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. In regards to the goal of "ending violence against women", UN

Women works with member states governments, other UN agencies, and organizations in advocating the prevention of violence and increase of awareness on the causes and consequences of the issue. The organization also supports the integration of “sexual violence” as an issue addressed in international, regional, and national frameworks, such as the post-2015 development agenda.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1990s	Nepal: Security forces commits torturous and sexual violence against women supporting opposition group
1998	Indonesia: Sexual violence was perpetrated against women in local populations. These acts were committed as intimidation for civilians to search for rebels.
1998-2000	Ethiopia: Soldiers of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front targeted women from various indigenous groups within the country with systematic sexual violence
2001	Central African Republic (CAR): Widespread of sexual violence practices by almost all groups in the conflict, including Congolese, CAR Forces, and combatants from Chad.
2001	Afghanistan: There were reports of sexual violence committed by police, military forces, and former fighters, against women activists and teachers.
2002	Burma/Myanmar: The Shan Human Rights Foundation and the Shan Women’s Action Network reported 173 incidences of sexual violence committed by Myanmar army officers, involving 625 women and girls.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- “Women, Peace and Security”, 31 October 2000 (**S/RES/1325**)
 - First resolution to ever address the effects of armed conflicts on women. This resolution called upon member states to protect women and girls from gender based violence, including any kind of sexual abuse. The resolution also called for prosecutions of those responsible for war crimes, including acts of sexual violence against civilians.
- “Women, Peace and Security”, 19 June 2008 (**S/RES/1820**)
 - The resolution recognizes that sexual violence poses great threat to international peace and security. It requests member states and other organizations within the international community to make use of resources to protect civilians from any and all kinds of violence.

- “Women, Peace and Security”, 30 September 2009 (**S/RES/1888**)
 - As a follow-up resolution to **S/RES/1820**, the 2009 Security Council resolution called for specific provisions with the purpose of protecting women and girls from any kind of sexual violence, especially in conflict zones. Additionally, it requested the UN Secretary General to ensure comprehensive monitoring and reporting of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

“UNiTE to End Violence” campaign

In 2008, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban-Ki Moon, launched the campaign “UNiTE to End Violence” with the aim of spreading awareness among the public and increasing involvement of various parties in the efforts of combating all forms of violence against women and girls. This campaign recognizes the fact that a world free of violence can only be achieved with the united efforts of governments in all member states, as well as other relevant organizations. In addressing the issue at hand, the campaign not only supports NGOs, but also actively engages other activists in the society to speak out about sexual violence. Some of the goals of this campaign entail adopting and enforcing laws that punish all acts of violence against women, implementing action plans proposed by each nation, and establishing an effective data collection system to record the prevalence of violence around the world.

UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict

In response to the strong requests from various Non-Governmental Organizations, especially those supporting women’s rights, the UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict was created as an international body with the goal of working toward the goal of preventing sexual violence in conflict and alleviating its harsh aftermath. The action has three main areas of focus: Country Level Action, which provides targeted support for selected member states, Advocating for Action, which raises awareness on the issue, and Learning by Doing, which strives for effective responses for emergency events. The international body unites 13 UN entities in a joint effort to implement the plans of actions for each individual member state along with UN efforts to effectively address the issue at hand, and forge stronger partnerships between NGOs that have been working to end sexual violence in conflict zones for many years. Additionally, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict works to increase women’s role in the national and international efforts, and to expand women’s access to decision-making, and voicing out their ideas in public affairs.

Possible Solutions

Expanding awareness on sexual violence in conflict zones

- The topic of sexual violence is commonly a very discrete matter, especially for the victims. In many communities, being a victim of rape is considered extremely shameful, therefore most women who have experienced these kinds of traumatizing events tend to stay quiet about their experiences. It is imperative for the United Nations and all of its member states to realize the importance of public awareness and put in efforts to normalize the discussion of the topic at hand, and to ensure that it is socially acceptable for victims to voice out their experiences and concerns.
- This could be achieved through a number of ways. Member states could work with relevant Non-Governmental Organizations and United Nations Organizations to launch public information campaigns to educate the public about the prevalence of sexual violence in the status quo, the heavy repercussions of such violent acts, the importance of reporting incidents and seeking help as soon as possible, the local and international law that prohibits any person from perpetrating sexual and gender-based violence, and the penalties that comes with breaching these laws and regulations.

Protection of civilians in areas of conflict

- Civilians suffer a huge toll in times of conflict. In order to prevent any and all violence from being perpetrated toward them, there needs to be actions that directly protect the innocent civilians of the communities scattered within the region of conflict. These actions can include the following:
- Increase security and safety of refugee sites. Firstly, member states and relevant organizations could establish a system to effectively document and track each individual entering and exiting the refugee camp.
- They could also increase the level of security of these refugee sites by employing more police protection and security patrols. However, delegates must consider the fact that guards and UN peacekeepers are perpetrators to many of the sexual violence cases. Therefore, there is a need for rules and regulations that strictly forbids these armed personnel from taking advantage of the civilians inside the refugee sites.
- It would also be greatly beneficial to design effective sites and facilities for the civilians, ensuring that the layout of the camps can meet the needs of the refugees and help prevent the occurrences of sexual violence. For example: ensuring that the facilities are well lit, avoiding overcrowding, providing separate housing for unaccompanied children...etc.

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