



# SEXUAL VIOLENCE DURING & AFTER CONFLICT

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE  
16 DÍAS DE ACTIVISMO CONTRA LA VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO  
16 JOURS D'ACTIVISME CONTRE LA VIOLENCE DE GENRE  
25 NOV - 10 DEC <http://16dayscwgj.rutgers.edu>



By the Center for Women's Global Leadership and Nobel Women's Initiative

**Conflict-Related Sexual Violence** - In recent years, increasing attention is being paid to forms of sexualized violence that take place in and around conflict zones, including rape, sexual mutilation, forced impregnation or sterilization and sexual violence within the military. Such violent acts constitute severe human rights violations against individuals and communities. While sexual violence in and after conflict is part of a continuum of violations that women and girls face, the instability and insecurity that armed conflict bring tends to exacerbate violence against women and make its forms more extreme, widespread and fatal. Even after a 'recognized' conflict ends, sexual violence may continue at high rates in homes and communities while a militarized environment remains. Many women's organizations have emphasized the artificial separation created by terms like conflict vs. post-conflict, citing that militarized violence continues for women despite the end of a formal war.

Discussions by international bodies and governments alike regarding conflict-related violence should not only involve making 'war safer for women,' but have the ultimate goal of ending wars. Militarized violence is directly linked to building and strengthening power and hierarchies, especially power over 'others.' Because militarism privileges certain violent forms of masculinity that often emphasize men's power over women (and in some cases over other men), there is a direct correlation with the use of sexual violence as a tool to reinforce gendered and political hierarchies. Given this reality, it is vital that men are involved in the process of questioning violent forms of masculinity.

Survivors have also explained the ways in which the lack of medical resources, the absence of support services and counseling, and the failures of the police and legal systems to investigate and prosecute crimes are also deterrents to reporting sexual violence. In response to these challenges an increase in fund allocations by governments and the international community is needed for the care and support of survivors, particularly to ensure access to reproductive health services and proper collection of evidence. Meanwhile, perpetrators of sexual violence also need access to reintegration, reconciliation, and rehabilitation programs and processes.

While the UN system has made some progress in addressing sexual violence, a significant gap remains between international discussions and concrete changes at national and local levels. More can be done to learn from the work of women's rights organizations at the national level. While measures to protect women from violence during conflict are important, it is equally important to support women's roles as agents of change and as peace-makers, such as documenting their role(s) in peace building efforts and ensuring that their voices are heard in national and international discussions.

## Caroline's Account (age 15), Democratic Republic of the Congo

*I was on my way to the fields with my mother. The soldiers took us to Lubao. There, they tied us up, gave my mother 50 lashes of the whip and then put her in another house. They bound me hand and foot, too, and gave me 80 lashes. The next day, they took us to the riverside, pushed a tree branch into our backs and dropped us into the water. Each morning, noon and evening, they would put us all in the same house, force us to lie on the ground and then they would rape us, all in the same room. While they were doing this, they were hitting and kicking us in the stomach, back and face. My mother's hand was broken; it is still swollen and she can't use it. My buttocks are still painful and I can't use my arm any more. There were twelve soldiers and they raped us every evening. They gave us nothing to eat or drink and we had to drink whatever water we could find on the ground.*

*One day, we ran away, but two mayi-mayi caught us and took us back to Lubao. They tortured us for several weeks and raped us. In August, we managed to run away, but when we arrived [home], everything had been looted and the house had been burned down. Before, I was a student and had friends, but now we have no home, nothing, so I can't study any more. When we walk along the street, people look down on us. The community despises us. I will never forget that I have been raped.*

Excerpted from:

Amnesty International. 2004. "Democratic Republic of Congo: Mass rape – time for remedies."

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR/62/018/2004>

## Suggested Actions

- **Join the International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence:** Become part of the first ever global collaboration between women Nobel Peace Laureates, international advocacy organizations, groups and individuals working at the international, regional and community levels to end sexual violence in conflict. Call for urgent and bold political leadership to prevent rape in conflict, to protect civilians and rape survivors, and call for justice for all. Sign up now at: <http://www.stoprapeinconflict.org/>.
- **Advocate:** The UN Security Council has passed a number of resolutions (1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960) related to women, peace and security, and governments are asked to make commitments to implement them. Advocate for women's participation in decision making at all levels on peace and security issues, including: peace negotiations; demobilization, disarmament, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration; reconciliation and reparation processes; and peace-building, recovery and reconstruction efforts. More information is available through the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders: <http://www.gnwp.org/>.
- **Create Safe Spaces:** If your organization has experience with counseling survivors of violence, develop trainings to teach others about proper counseling protocol, available legal and medical resources, confidentiality, collection of evidence and testimonies, and sensitivity to survivors.
- **Spread the Word:** Invite the media to report on your activities or ask them to raise the issue of conflict-related sexual violence in their reporting. Call upon your politicians and ask them to support international, national, or local efforts to end sexual violence in and after conflict. Use your own social media sites as a platform for sharing information about the issues and steps that activists can take.
- **Support an Organization:** Connect with women's community-based organizations working in conflict areas or with displaced and refugee communities and provide financial and/or moral support for their advocacy and survivor support work. If you have access to financial resources, consider hosting a fundraiser for an organization that has a proven track record of working with survivors of sexual violence.
- **Men & Boys:** Men and boys who believe in gender equality can be important allies in activism to end gender-based violence in conflict. Invite the men and boys you know to attend 16 Days events with you and ask them to share their ideas about how to involve their peers in ending violence. For more ideas, visit the White Ribbon Campaign (<http://www.whiteribbon.ca/>) or the MenEngage Alliance (<http://www.menengage.org/>).

## Resources

- Eriksson Baaz, Maria and Maria Stern. (2010) *The Complexity of Violence: A Critical Analysis of Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*. Sida Working Paper on Gender Based Violence. [http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/vaw\\_thecomplexityofviolence\\_nordicafrica-sida\\_2010.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/vaw_thecomplexityofviolence_nordicafrica-sida_2010.pdf).
- Nobel Women's Initiative. (2011) *War on Women: Time for Action to End Sexual Violence in Conflict*. [http://www.nobelwomensinitiative.org/wp-content/archive/stories/Conference\\_Ottawa\\_Women\\_Forging\\_a\\_New\\_Security/war-on-women-web.pdf](http://www.nobelwomensinitiative.org/wp-content/archive/stories/Conference_Ottawa_Women_Forging_a_New_Security/war-on-women-web.pdf).
- Otto, Diane and Helena Gronberg. (2009) "Confronting Sexual Violence in Conflict Situations." from *Women Claiming Justice: Using International Law in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations*. [http://www.iwtc.org/Legal\\_Handbook/Handbook.pdf](http://www.iwtc.org/Legal_Handbook/Handbook.pdf).
- Global Network of Women Peacebuilders: <http://www.gnwp.org/>
- Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict: <http://www.gppac.net/page.php?id=1>
- Isis Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis WICCE): <http://www.isis.or.ug/>
- The Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium: <http://www.rhrc.org/>
- Stop Rape in Conflict: <http://www.stoprapeinconflict.org/>
- Stop Rape Now: UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict. *Various online resources available discussing sexual violence in conflict:* <http://www.stoprapenow.org/advocacy-resources/>
- UN Women Resolutions and Instruments: [http://www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/women\\_war\\_peace/resolutions\\_instruments.php](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_war_peace/resolutions_instruments.php)
- Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice: <http://www.iccwomen.org/>
- Women Under Siege: <http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/>