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Impact of conflicts

Israel - Palestine

The Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip as part of the armed conflict with Hamas, which lasted for 50 days from 8 July to 27 August, had devastating consequences for the Palestinian civilian population. The UN estimated the total number of Palestinian casualties at 2,104, of which 1,462 were civilians, including 495 children and 253 women. Meanwhile, the Israeli death toll stood at 66 soldiers and seven civilians. Israel was widely criticised for some of its actions during the conflict, especially for indiscriminate attacks on UN schools turned into shelters. The conflict forcibly displaced thousands of people and inflicted great destruction in the Palestinian territory. In this context, Palestinian women's organisations that participated in the 27th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva demanded that the international community hold

Israel accountable for abuses committed in Gaza, as well as for violations of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories. The women expressed concern about the continuation of the ceasefire unless the blockade on the Gaza Strip is lifted and also demanded the inclusion of a gender perspective when rebuilding it. The Palestinian women did not participate formally and were not consulted in negotiating a truce between Hamas and Israel, so they appealed to Resolution 1325, stressing the need for Palestinian women to play a larger role in resolving the conflict with Israel. Moreover, women's organisations from all over the world organised and joined in protests against the bombing of Gaza by the Israeli government and denounced the severe impact of the armed conflict.

- AWID, "Palestinian Women Call on Human Rights Council for Accountability towards Israel and Guaranteeing Internationally Recognized Rights to Human Security", AWID, 1 October 2014
- BBC, "Gaza crisis: Toll of operations in Gaza", BBC, 1 September 2014

Syria

The armed conflict in Syria had caused the most severe crisis of forcibly displaced people in the world today, with a special impact on women. Nearly four out of five of the three million people that have fled the country are women or children. In this context, and given the death, absence or detention of their partners, many women have become the main providers for their families. According to UNHCR estimates, more than 145,000 Syrian families currently living in Egypt, Iraq, Turkey and Jordan are being led by

women, which amounts to a quarter of the families that have been forced to flee the country as a result of the conflict. A recent UNHCR study pays particular attention to the many challenges faced by these women. Without claiming to be statistically representative, the study is based on interviews with 135 Syrian refugees and illustrates the problems they face in the daily struggle for their families' survival. Most of them expressed great concern about the impact of the conflict on their sons

and daughters, including on their safety and physical and mental health in a context in which child labour has increased and access to education and the most essential services has been made difficult. Syrian refugee women encounter many problems in obtaining money and a safe place for their families and one in every three admits that she does not have enough to eat. More vulnerable to situations of exploitation and harassment, many receive offers of money, aid or lodging in exchange for sexual favours or are subjected to humiliation merely for being unaccompanied by a man. Despite this adversity, the testimonies of Syrian female refugees also demonstrate their resilience, their solidarity with other women and their ability to organise in the search for spaces of mutual support.

- UNHCR, Women alone: the fight for survival by Syria's refugee women, UNHCR, July 2014
- The Guardian, "Syria's female refugees facing poverty, harassment and isolation", The Guardian, 8 July 2014

Kosovo

The chief prosecutor of the Special Investigative Task Force (SITF), a body established by the EU in 2011 to investigate the allegations contained in a Council of Europe report on serious crimes after the end of the Kosovo War in June 1999, announced that there is enough evidence to formally charge certain senior officials of the former armed group KLA that it holds responsible for conducting a persecution campaign against Serbs, Roma and other minorities after the end of the war, as well as against Albanian political opponents of the KLA. According to information presented in late July by the chief prosecutor, Clint Williamson, the SITF has compiled information indicating that certain members of the KLA intentionally persecuted minority populations with acts that included murder, abduction, forced disappearance, illegal detention in camps in Kosovo and Albania, sexual violence, other forms of inhumane treatment, forced displacement and the profanation and destruction of churches and other religious places. According to Williamson, this persecution resulted in the ethnic cleansing of a large proportion of the Serbian and Roma population in areas south of the Ibar River, except for a few enclaves. The chief prosecutor said that the widespread or systematic nature of these crimes justifies charges of crimes against humanity, and probably of war crimes as well. Williamson denounced the atmosphere of intimidation, and especially witness intimidation. The evidence discovered is consistent with other information compiled in other reports, such as that of the Council of Europe drafted by rapporteur Dick Marty that was approved by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2011, as well as previous reports released by NGOs and other organisations (e.g., Human Rights Watch and the OSCE).

However, the special court where the SITF will press charges for these crimes has not yet been established and is planned to be operational in 2015. In April, the Parliament of Kosovo approved the establishment of the new court, despite criticism from senior officials, including the prime minister and former commander of the KLA, Hashim Thaci, who faces allegations in Dick Marty's report and described the future court as the greatest injustice and insult to Kosovo while also stating that the accusations would be demonstrated to be false. Nevertheless, some legislative changes were still pending before the court could be established. Amnesty International welcomed the report of the chief prosecutor of the SITF and urged the EU and the government and Parliament of Kosovo to ensure that the necessary measures are taken to prevent the process from dragging on. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) had no mandate to investigate crimes committed in the aftermath of the war in Kosovo. The legal proceedings will be an opportunity to investigate and prosecute sexual violence committed against women from minority communities in Kosovo, despite many likely obstacles such as the already present climate of intimidation, the unresolved conflict between Serbia and Kosovo and the still-unclear status of Serbmajority northern Kosovo, the weight of the taboo of sexual violence, the patriarchal context and the greater attention that Kosovar local organisations have paid thus far to sexual violence committed by Serbian perpetrators against Albanians. In this context, the campaign continued to petition the United Nations to investigate cases of rape committed by Serbian armed actors during the war in Kosovo. By late July, 115,759 Kosovars had signed the petition. The initiative is organised by local activists and the Kosovar authorities.

- Clint Williamson, Statement of the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Investigative Task Force, SITF, 29 July 2014
- BIRN, "Kosovo Wins Public Support for War Rape Report", BIRN, 31 July 2014
- Edona Peci, "Kosovo MPs Approve New War Crimes Court", BIRN, 23 April 2014
- Amnesty International, Kosovo: Report on investigations into KLA must lead to prosecutions for crimes against humanity, Amnesty International, 30 July 2014

DR Congo

The medical NGO Heal Africa reported that there were nearly 3,000 victims of sexual violence in the provinces of North Kivu and Maniema in the first six months of the year and that it could provide aid to half of them. Heal Africa said that the sexual violence had been committed by both armed men and civilians. The organisation stressed the need for greater emphasis on giving the victims legal assistance since most cases are not brought to trial, even when formally accused.

AFP, "3,000 victims of sexual violence in two DRC provinces: charity", ReliefWeb, 18 August 2014

Nepal

The human rights organisation Human Rights Watch reported that the sexual violence that took place during the armed conflict that affected the country from 1996 to 2006 remains unpunished and has not yet been properly investigated. Both government security forces and the Maoist armed opposition group were responsible for acts of sexual violence, though most were committed by members of the former. The number of women affected by sexual violence is unknown, as the fear of retribution and social stigma prevented it from being reported when the armed conflict raged and there are still many obstacles to formally reporting it since it has ended. The women were victims of gang and individual rape, sexual assault with objects and verbal abuse and threats. Human Rights Watch also revealed the lack of services to assist the survivors of sexual violence, as well as the shortcomings of the future Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

HRW, Silenced and Forgotten: Survivors of Nepal's Conflict-Era Sexual Violence, HRW, 23 September 2014

ISIS: Sexual abuse and violence in Iraq

After leading attacks in Syria, the armed jihadist group Islamic State (better known as ISIS or IS) has captured international attention in recent months for its bloody offensive and rapid rise in northern Iraq. One of the features of its modus operandi has been the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, which has been widely denounced by the UN, human rights organisations and local women's groups. ISIS has been accused of perpetrating savage acts of sexual violence against thousands of people, the vast majority of them women and adolescents of both sexes, including mass kidnappings and rape, the forced marriage of women and girls to the group's combatants, situations of sexual slavery and the sale and purchase of women considered war trophies, among other practices.

The minorities of Iraq have been the main victims of this violence. According to a joint statement by the UN Secretary-General's special representative on sexual violence in conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, and the special envoy for Iraq, Nickolay Mladenov, by mid-August around 1,500 people from Yazidi and Christian communities had been forced into sexual slavery. A recent report by Amnesty International detailing the persecution of the minorities of Iraq by ISIS described some forms of abuse to which the group is subjecting women and girls, noting that some of its victims that have been raped or forced to marry their captors have committed suicide. According to various analysts, the group is deliberately using sexual violence as a strategy to instil terror, strengthen its control, destabilise conquered communities and stigmatise the female victims of abuse in a context where women are considered the repository of collective honour.

In addition to sexual violence, the women of Iraq have suffered (and in many cases continue to suffer) from other effects of the advance of ISIS. Thousands have been forced to flee their homes in search of shelter, exposing themselves to situations of extreme vulnerability and even dying of hunger and thirst, as happened to the Yazidi population that fled to Sinjar Mountain in August. In the territory where the armed jihadist group has established control, it has imposed a strict code of behaviour and dress that does not allow women to leave home unaccompanied by a man from their family and forces them to fully cover themselves in public places. Those that do not comply with these restrictions risk being publicly beaten. Cases have also been reported of women forced to convert to Islam. In addition, evidence suggests that ISIS has executed many women, including one accused of adultery, two others that had been candidates in the recent elections in Iraq and the lawyer and women's rights activist Sameera Salih al-Nuaimi, who was tortured and executed in public after criticising ISIS for destroying heritage in Mosul. The United

Nations has received information on the summary trials and executions of women and has warned that educated and professional women are especially likely to suffer violence at the hands of the group.

Given this situation, Iraqi women's organisations have called on the international community to take action against ISIS. The Iragi Women Network (IWN), which brings together 90 women's groups, made a special appeal to the UN Security Council, the CEDAW Committee and the Human Rights Council to act to secure the condemnation of the barbaric practices of ISIS, which may be classified as crimes of genocide. Specifically, the IWN requested the creation of an international committee to investigate the situation of women in territories controlled by ISIS, the adoption of measures to free women and children held by the armed group, the protection of displaced women and their families, the provision of urgent humanitarian aid and medical assistance to the victims of ISIS and the protection of witnesses to abuse.

Meanwhile, women have also organised and demonstrated locally. In different cities around the country, including several in the province of Anbar where ISIS has consolidated its position, groups such as the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) are working to provide shelter, food and medical attention to women that have been raped or that have fled their homes due to the violence of ISIS. With no intention to understate the seriousness of the jihadist group's crimes, some voices have stressed that violence against women in Iraq did not begin or end with ISIS, but lies along a continuum that has characterised the turbulent post-invasion scene in the country. Thus, they have drawn attention to the hypocrisy of some authorities that now warn about ISIS but did not act to stop gender violence over the last decade despite continued complaints by Iraqi women's organisations.

- AINA, "Iraqi Women Network Calls for Action Against ISIS", Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), 3 September 2014
- Al-Ali, Nadje, "Sexualized violence in Iraq: How to understand and fight it", Open Democracy, 29 September 2014
- Amnesty International, Ethnic Cleansing on a Historic Scale: Islamic State's Systematic Targeting of Minorities in Northern Iraq, London: Amnesty International, September 2014.
- Beghikhani, Nazand, "Iraq: Sexual Violence as a War Strategy in Iraq", Your Middle East, 11 August 2014
- Cumming-Bruce, Nick, "Women's Rights Activist Executed by ISIS in Iraq", New York Times, 25 September 2014
- Susskind, Yifat, "Under ISIS, Iraqi women again face an old nightmare: violence and repression", The Guardian, 3 July 2014
- UN News, "Barbaric' sexual violence perpetrated by Islamic State in Iraq", UN News, 13 August 2014

Bosnia

In its review of the implementation of the 2010 recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review, a mechanism for regularly examining the human rights situation in UN member countries under the umbrella of the Human Rights Council, Amnesty International noted that the authorities in Bosnia have denied rights to survivors of sexual violence in war by failing to prosecute these crimes or to ensure substantive remedial measures, including compensation, rehabilitation, settlement and guarantees that they will not be repeated. Moreover, the necessary protection and support has not been given to witnesses in judicial proceedings for sexual violence-related war crimes.

Amnesty International, Amnesty International assessment of the implementation by states of previous UPR recommendations: 20th Session of the UPR Working Group, 27 October - 7 November 2014, Amnesty International, 1 August 2014

Violence against girls

The UNICEF report Hidden in Plain Sight, considered the greatest compilation of information to date on violence against minors (which documents violence committed in supposedly safe places like homes, communities and schools with data on 190 countries) warns of the prevalence of such violence and its lingering effects, including the risk of poverty, unemployment and the recurrence of violence. According to the report, at least 120 million girls under the age of 20 (one in ten) have been forced into sexual acts and about 84 million married adolescents from 15 to 19 years old have suffered emotional, physical or sexual violence at the hands of their husbands or partners. This

proportion rises considerably in different countries. In DR Congo and Equatorial Guinea, for example, violence committed by an intimate partner stands at 70%, and in Uganda the figure is 50%. The UNICEF report also examines other forms of violence against minors, such as homicide. One fifth of the victims of homicide in the world are children and adolescents under the age of 20 and it is the leading cause of death for males aged 10 to 19 in Panama, Venezuela, El Salvador, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Guatemala and Colombia. Furthermore, around the world over one in three students between 13 and 15 years old suffers from regular bullying at school. The report also analyses attitudes towards violence and suggests coping strategies. Moreover, another UNICEF report on female genital mutilation and child marriage notes that while

the use of both practices has dropped, great effort is still required as they continue to be widespread. Thus, more than 700 million women were child brides, 250 million of which were less than 15 years old when they were married. The report warns that girls who married before the age of 18 are less likely to continue going to school and are more likely to suffer domestic violence. Moreover, adolescent girls are more likely to die from complications in pregnancy and childbirth than women older than 20. There are also more risks that their children are premature or die within the first month after birth. More than 130 million girls and women have undergone some sort of genital mutilation in the 29 African and Middle Eastern countries where the practice is most common. UNICEF stressed the need for local strategies that involve communities, families and girls.

- UNICEF, New global data expose acute prevalence of violence against children, UNICEF, 4 September 2014
- UNICEF, No time to lose: New UNICEF data show need for urgent action on female genital mutilation and child marriage,
 UNICEF, 22 July 2014

Peacebuilding

Colombia

As part of the peace negotiations between the government of Colombia and the FARC-EP guerrillas, in September both parties agreed to create a subcommittee on gender with a mandate to integrate the voices of women and a gender perspective in all agreements reached at the negotiating table, including partial ones and a potential final agreement. The subcommittee will be composed of five representatives from each party and will be advised by domestic and international experts. Presidential Advisor for Women's Equality Nigeria Rentería, who is also participating in the peace negotiations, underscored the importance of specifically making women's rights and a gender perspective a constitutive element of the peace accords. The FARC-EP, which designated five women to

join the subcommittee (Yira Castro, Diana Grajales, Victoria Sandino, Alexandra Nariño and Camila Cienfuegos), stressed the importance that non-discrimination on the basis of gender held for the armed group, stating that 40% of its members are women, and blasted accusations that the guerrillas had used sexual violence, saying that the Colombian Armed Forces and paramilitary groups were responsible for it. Meanwhile, women's organisations welcomed the creation of the subcommittee, though they were sceptical about the genuine inclusion of gender perspectives in the peace negotiations. On numerous occasions, women's organisations have claimed that all armed parties to the conflict have been responsible for committing crimes of sexual violence.

- Declaración de la Alta Consejera para la Equidad de la Mujer, Nigeria Rentería, al instalar la subcomisión de Género en la Mesa de Conversaciones de La Habana, 7 September 2014
- FARC-EP, Instalación de sub-comisión de género: Por una Nueva Colombia sin discriminación de género, 7 September 2014

Somalia

The special representative of the UN Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, Leila Zerrougui, visited Somalia and Nairobi from 16 to 21 August. The president, prime minister and main government ministers pledged to implement the relevant action plans on minors and armed conflict, support the worldwide "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the

Child. The Somali Army was presented as a persistent perpetrator of violations of the rights of boys and girls in the UN Secretary-General's report on May 2013, specifically for recruiting and using minors and for killing and mutilating them. The armed group al-Shabaab also appeared in the report as a persistent perpetrator (a category applied to those that appear in these reports over more than five

consecutive years). The special representative also met with female civil society activists, journalists and students in order to listen to their opinions about the political situation and the future of the country. The women expressed their concern about preparations for the elections that will be held in 2016, in which female participation and decisionmaking was still very low.

Moreover, in July UNSOM and UN Women supported the Somali Ministry of Women's Issues and Human Rights Development to hold consultations to review the Platform for Action that emerged from the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, which were attended by 60 participants from civil society and the federal government. This review should lead to a report on the situation of women in 12 areas of critical concern for the Platform. Meanwhile, after much consultation, the federal government created a national action plan on sexual violence in conflict that was approved by several competent government ministries, including the ministries of defence and justice, as well as by the Somali Army and police force. Meetings were also held with civil society organisations. The federal government presented the draft plan to the international community at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict that met in June and plans to finalise it after regional consultations are held. The progress made under the Action Plan was hailed by local players, the United Nations and the donor community and promises were made to support the implementation phase.

UN Security Council, Report of the UN Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia, 25 September 2014

Puntland (Somalia)

The situation in Somalia continued to be marked by instability and violence and new activity by al-Shabaab was noted in the northeastern part of Puntland, where only sporadic episodes of violence had occurred thus far. Still, different analysts agree that the election of Abdiweli Mohamed Ali Gas as the new president of Puntland in January could be the start of a new political period of improvement in the situation of women in the region, with several women holding positions of responsibility in the regional government. These include Sahra Said Nur, the minister of federal and constitutional affairs, and Anisa Abdulkadir Haji Mumin, who is in charge of women's development and family affairs. Both have tried to use their positions of power to boost democratisation initiatives in the country and the situation of women, respectively, promoting the right to women's education, posts of political responsibility and employment. However, many challenges remain, especially with regard to human rights violations and sexual violence in the country, in addition to the marginalisation of women in politics.

- Somalia Online, "Puntland's New President appoints More Women to Key Cabinet Posts", Somalia Online, 28 January 2014
- Horseedmedia, "Somalia: Puntland Government Announces Plans to boost Democratization", Horseedmedia, 11 May 2014
- Garowe Online, "Somalia: Somali Women keen on more vehement role in politics [Interview with Minister]", Garowe Online, 2 September 2014

Resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity

The UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity, considered a landmark by human rights organisations and the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual) rights movement. Promoted by several South American countries, the resolution passed with 25 votes in favour, 14 votes against (including Russia, Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia) and seven abstentions. The resolution expresses concern about acts of violence and discrimination against people because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and calls for greater involvement from the High Commissioner in reporting and investigating such acts.

Human Rights Council, "Human Rights Council adopts resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity and concludes twenty-seventh session", Human Rights Council, 26 September 2014

Resolution 1325

Senegal (Casamance)

Senegalese women's organisations are promoting different initiatives aimed at encouraging peace in the Casamance region after more than three decades of conflict. Coinciding with the International Day of Peace, in September the Plateforme des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance (Women's Platform for Peace in Casamance, PFPC) held a meeting with various civil society groups to analyse the current situation of the conflict and the prospects for peace negotiations. The PFPC stressed the need to sponsor the joint work of different players committed to peace to accompany and strengthen talks between the Senegalese government and the armed group MFDC, with a view to a final solution to the conflict. In order to influence the peace process in the region more effectively, the various organisations signed a commitment agreement on joint actions after the meeting. Meanwhile, the Comité Régional de Solidarité des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance (USOFORAL in the Jola language) announced the organisation of a week of regional and nationwide mobilisation for peace in Casamance. The purpose is to mobilise women in the 14 regions of Senegal, Gambia and Guinea-Bissau so they may share their ideas on a peaceful end to the conflict in Casamance. It also aims to raise consciousness among women all over Senegal that the conflict in Casamance does not solely concern the people of that region. The conclusions of this week of mobilisation, which is scheduled for April 2015, are planned to be sent to the authorities and to the MFDC. USOFORAL coordinator Seynablu Male Cissé has appealed to Resolution 1325 to demand the involvement of women in the peace process. Notably, before the start of negotiations between the government and the MFDC, women's organisations led marches and vigils for peace, promoted the signing of a "memorandum for peace" to commit presidential candidates prior to the elections in 2012, met with senior officials and confidentially sat down with political representatives of the MFDC. Ritual practices led by priestesses also sought to promote the smooth progress of the negotiations.

- APS, "Table ronde sur le processus de paix en Casamance", Agence de Presse Sénégalaise, 17 September 2014
- "USOFORAL annonce une semaine de mobilisation pour la paix en Casamance en avril", Agence de Presse Sénégalaise, 12 September 2014
- Ndeye, Ignace, "Pacte d'engagement pour les acteurs du processus de paix", Sud Quotidien, 25 September 2014

Human Rights Council

In its annual discussion on integrating a gender perspective into the work of the Human Rights Council, the participants, which included panelists, member countries and organisations, highlighted the importance of strengthening a gender perspective and incorporating it into its various mechanisms. They appreciated the efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in this direction within the scope of its activities and urged the Human Rights Council to take similar action. Some participants argued that gender analysis should be part of the core work in all country-specific procedures, and not an occasional element. Others said that the results so far have been uneven and that disaggregated data by sex and a more consistent gender analysis were lacking, stressing that progress could be made in this regard through greater collaboration with UN Women, for example, especially in countries where the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was absent, which could provide information on the situation of women and children, including disaggregated data by sex. Progress could also come through more cooperation between country-specific holders of Council mechanisms and women's organisations in visits to the countries.

The panel on integrating a gender perspective also indicated that greater dialogue on these issues between the holders of the mechanisms and intergovernmental bodies could be another possible field of action. The inclusion of specific references to violence against women in special procedures and specific resolutions was also suggested. The possibility of promoting the rapid deployment of experts under certain mechanisms to investigate gender violence was also discussed, including sexual violence, such as international crimes. The discussion also emphasised the need for greater integration of the international women, peace and security agenda in the Council's work, as well as for greater attention to be paid to new instruments emerging in the United Nations system, such as gender indicators. The pending challenges cited included a lack of political will, a lack of understanding on the meaning of the gender dimension, the lack of visibility regarding the violations of women's human rights and the role of traditions, cultures and regions.

 Human Rights Council, Human Rights Council holds annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective in its work, 15 September 2014

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Plaça del Coneixement - Edifici MRA (Mòdul Recerca A) Campus de la UAB - 08193 Bellaterra (Cerdanyola del Vallès) Barcelona, Spain Tel.: +34 93 586 88 48 / Fax: +34 93 581 32 94 pr.conflictes.escolapau@uab.cat http://escolapau.uab.cat

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