

'It is time for us all to count the number of women at the peace table, the number of women raped in war, the number of internally displaced women who never recover their property, the number of women human rights defenders killed for speaking out. All of this counts, and we are counting.'

Inés Alberdi, Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, October 2009



WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Women, war and peace

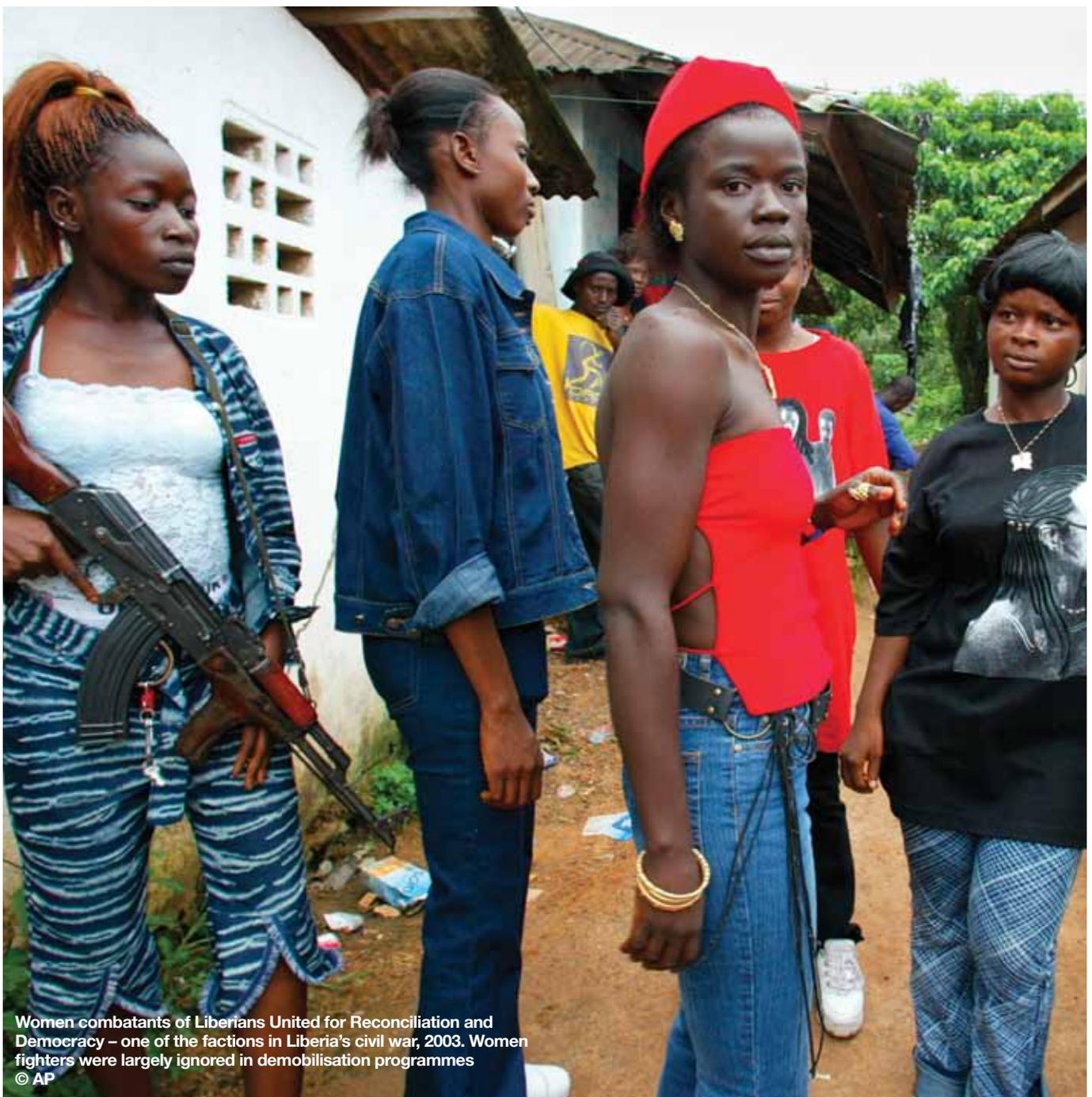


Supporters of Afghan female member of parliament Malalai Joya demonstrate in Kabul, Afghanistan calling for her to be reinstated. She had been voted out by her fellow parliamentarians for violating a rule that bars them from criticising one another.
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WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT

In times of violent conflict and instability, as gender stereotypes are reinforced and discrimination intensifies, violence against women increases. Systematic rape, and the mutilation and murder of women and girls are common in warfare. In most of today's wars, where civilian casualties far outnumber those of armed combatants, women and men both suffer human rights violations. However, women and girls are more likely to be the target of sexual violence, especially rape.

Women are likely to be among the primary victims of direct attacks on the civilian population. They also generally bear the brunt of so-called collateral damage, the killing or maiming of civilians as a result of military attacks, or of landmines and unexploded ordnance that can kill long after the war is over. These experiences make it vital that women are central to any peace building process.



Women combatants of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy – one of the factions in Liberia's civil war, 2003. Women fighters were largely ignored in demobilisation programmes
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RAPE AS A WEAPON OF WAR

'I think for the whole of my life, all my life, I will feel the pain that I felt then.'

A Bosnian girl who was a sexual slave to Bosnian Serb paramilitary soldiers

As a weapon of war, rape is used strategically and tactically to conquer, expel or control women and their communities. As a form of gender-based torture it is used to extract information, punish, intimidate and humiliate. It is the universal weapon employed to strip women of their dignity and destroy their sense of self. It is also used to terrorise and destroy entire communities.

The impact and trauma of rape extend far beyond the attack itself. Women survivors face emotional torment, psychological damage, physical injuries, disease, social ostracism and many other consequences that can devastate their lives.

In situations of inter-communal strife or conflicts drawn along ethnic or religious lines, women of a particular community or social group may be assaulted because they are seen as embodying the 'honour' and integrity of the community.

Attacks on women are sometimes directed against them as the 'carrier' of the next generation of the 'enemy'. This explains why attacks on women sometimes include mutilation of their genitalia or the cutting out and destruction of foetuses. In Guatemala, for example, soldiers told Amnesty International that during the three decades of armed conflict from 1961, they had carried out such acts to 'eliminate guerrilla spawn'.

Similar atrocities were reported in 2004 in Sudan, and in recent conflicts in a number of other African countries women's genitalia were mutilated after rape. In the former Yugoslavia horrific abuses were carried out in 'rape houses', sometimes with the purpose of forcing women to become pregnant.

Violence against women is not incidental in conflict but is embedded in all aspects of warfare. Patterns of violence against women in conflict do not arise 'naturally', but are ordered or condoned as a result of political calculations, and carried out with impunity.

Women can face insurmountable obstacles to obtaining justice because of the stigma attached to survivors of sexual violence, and women's disadvantaged position in society. And the brutalising impact of violence can have lasting repercussions for women long after armed conflict has ended.

Democratic Republic of Congo: In April 2003, Sanguina and her friend Miriam were raped at gunpoint by three soldiers from one of the warring parties. They were walking to their fields near Walungu, in South-Kivu. Six months later, Sanguina was raped again by another soldier, this time in her home. She became pregnant and in March 2004, when she told her story to Amnesty International, she was close to despair. 'In the community, they made such fun of me that I had to leave the village and live in the forest. Today, the only thing that I can think about is that I want an abortion. I am hungry, I have no clothes and no soap. I don't have any money to pay for medical care. It would be better if I died with the baby in my womb.'

FORCED TO FLEE

An estimated 80 per cent of people who have fled their homes to escape armed conflict are women and children

The growing number of armed conflicts and the violations associated with them have resulted in an increase in forced internal displacement and refugee flows. The displacement is often deliberate.

There are about 40 million displaced people in the world today, of which about 12 million are refugees, meaning that they have crossed an international border in search of safety.

Women refugees and internally displaced people remain vulnerable to violence and exploitation while in flight without the protection of their communities or male relatives, as well as in countries of asylum and during repatriation. The violence takes various forms, including rape and trafficking.

Displaced women are often the sole caretakers for their children. Girls may be kept out of school to help with domestic chores – which helps to explain the three-to-one ratio of school attendance between refugee boys and girls.



SUDANESE REFUGEES RAPED IN CHAD

Since 2003, more than 142,000 women and girls have escaped the Darfur conflict in Sudan, where mass rape of civilians was used as strategy to displace entire villages. However, in neighbouring eastern Chad, they remain targets of sexual violence inside and outside refugee camps. In many cases women are too scared to report the abuse, or attackers escape without being brought to justice.

One Sudanese refugee, Aisha, told Amnesty International that she was attacked by two men. One pulled out a gun. He asked Aisha where she was going and whether she was a refugee or Chadian. Aisha told him she was a refugee, returning to Bredjing refugee camp. He ordered her to give her child to the other man and come with him. She refused. She told him: 'You will rape me. I am not going to come with you'. The man threatened her with his gun, so she handed her child over to the other man and walked with the armed man. He hit her twice with his weapon, once on her arm, and once on her chest. He dragged the gun across her chest, above her breasts, leaving a wound. He then forced her to the ground. Although Aisha tried with all her force to fight back, the man raped her and abandoned her there.

WOMEN AS COMBATANTS

Women and girls are not only victims of armed conflict, they are also active agents and participants in conflict. They may actively choose to participate in the conflict and carry out acts of violence because they are committed to the political, religious or economic goals of the parties to the conflict. Women and girls may also be manipulated or forced into taking up military or violent roles (such as girl soldiers and female suicide bombers) through propaganda, abduction, intimidation and forced recruitment. Yet disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes often fail to acknowledge women combatants.

WOMEN AND POST-CONFLICT PEACE-BUILDING

'Women are not just victims... they must have a voice at all levels. We need to include women to reach a sustainable peace.'

Safaa Elagib Adam, Community Development Association, Darfur

Historically, women have been largely excluded from efforts to develop the rules of war. For example, of over 240 representatives to the Diplomatic Conference that adopted the Geneva Conventions, only 13 were women. Decades later, little has changed. For example, at the 2010 London Conference on Afghanistan, which was designed to discuss how to achieve lasting peace, women were nearly entirely absent.

The particular impact of armed conflict and militarisation upon women was hardly reflected in the rules of war and the international community has been slow to recognise violence against women – in any context – as a human rights issue. It has also been slow to involve women in peace-making, peacekeeping and peace-building operations, or in the aftermath of conflict, in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration initiatives.

The damage caused by armed conflict often leaves women without access to health care, whether in their communities, in camps for refugees and displaced people, or in demobilisation camps. When primary health services collapse, women are affected differently, and often disproportionately, because of their distinct health needs and care responsibilities. It is no surprise that countries suffering from violent conflict also have high rates of maternal mortality.

Attempts to address the human rights consequences of conflict, including the particular impacts on women, can only be comprehensive and long-lasting if women play an active part in all the relevant processes and mechanisms. And when women have been involved in the peace processes, they have proven to be creative and courageous participants, who have advanced the human rights of women.

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

'Our first priority must be to include women in peace talks as full and equal partners. If we do not – if we ignore sexual crimes – we trample on the principles of accountability, reconciliation and peace. We fail not just women but all people.'

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, June 2009

The UN Security Council (UNSC) is the international body charged with maintaining peace and security, but it was not until 2000 that it formally recognised that women were relevant to its concerns. In that year UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security broke new ground by placing

gender at the heart of peace and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives and policies. The resolution emphasises that the role of women should increase, at all decision-making levels, in prevention, management and resolution of conflict and in peace processes.

UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS

UNSC Resolution 1325 (October 2000) calls for women's full and equal participation in key institutions and decision-making bodies, and for all parties to armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law and to 'take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape'. It calls for the particular needs of women and girls to be considered in the design of refugee camps; in repatriation and resettlement; in mine clearance; in post-conflict reconstruction; and in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes.

UNSC Resolution 1820 (June 2008) makes clear that sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or genocide and stresses the need to end impunity for these crimes.

UNSC Resolution 1888 (September 2009), on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, called for the appointment of a Special Representative to the Secretary-General on ending sexual violence in conflict, and was adopted in September 2009.

UNSC Resolution 1889 (October 2009) sets out a range of measures to strengthen the participation of women at all stages of peace processes and calls for a global set of indicators to measure the implementation of Resolution 1325.

UN Security Council Resolutions apply to all UN member states. This makes the states responsible for their implementation and for devising national action plans.

The UK government has a good record on some aspects of UNSC resolutions on women, peace and security. The UK was one of the first countries to develop a National Action Plan on Resolution 1325 in 2006. Yet its implementation was hindered by lack of resources, reliable data and mechanisms to measure progress and lack of leadership.

On 25 November 2010, the UK government launched its new National Action Plan. This is an improvement on the original 2006 National Action Plan, particularly the commitment to formalise monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for women, peace and security commitments, including reporting to parliament. However Amnesty International is concerned that the fundamental barriers to operationalising the National Action Plan and implementing UNSCR 1325 remain – including lack of senior leadership and cross-government coordination and lack of allocated funds and resources.

OUR WORK

Amnesty International calls for all governments to respect, protect and fulfil women's right to freedom from crimes of violence, both in peacetime and in armed conflict, and for all other parties to armed conflict to similarly ensure that these fundamental rights are not abused. Amnesty International also calls for the full implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, particularly ensuring women play a key role in the design and implementation of all peace-building initiatives.