



UN WOMEN

Description of the Committee

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, known as UN Women, was created in July 2010 by the General Assembly as part of a reform initiative to more effectively address the difficulties faced by women around the globe. The body combines the efforts of the four bodies in existence at that time: the Division for Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). In accordance with the UN Charter, UN Women strives to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, empower women, and achieve equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security (unwomen.org). The main roles of UN Women are to support negotiations for the creation of universal gender equality standards, to assist in their implementation by providing knowledge and financial support to both intergovernmental bodies and member states, and to coordinate efforts with the UN system and hold it accountable for its commitments.



Headquartered in New York City, UN Women is represented in 80 countries and strives to increase this number. Globally, it serves to raise awareness of gender inequality, while at the country level it supports member states by request. It is up to each member state to decide what kind of support UN Women should provide. The body is funded both by the regular UN budget and voluntary contributions. Member states have recognized a minimum necessary investment of \$500 million US to realize the body's full potential.

Topic: Women, Peace and Security

Introduction

The targeting of women during armed conflict has been a problem throughout history and is recognized as a central security challenge. It is an unfortunate fact that when a conflict arises, women feel the majority of its effects. In times of war, in addition to suffering from associated threats, women are often targets of other forms of violence, including sexual abuse and torture. The discrepancy is largely caused by their social status. In an existing climate of discrimination against women and girls, the onset of conflict worsens the problem, and women are systematically targeted. In fact, gender-based and sexual violence is considered to be a defining characteristic of contemporary warfare. Abuses such as rape, forced impregnation or abortion, trafficking, sexual slavery and deliberate spreading of sexually transmitted infections such as HIV are prevalent.

Armed conflict also has a negative impact on women's health and socioeconomic status. Adverse health effects are caused by decreased access to health-care facilities and information, poor living conditions and social norms causing the prioritization of men in times of material shortage. Women are extremely vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, malnutrition, psychological distress and death during childbirth. The socioeconomic effects are felt when women are left behind as the sole caretakers of the household because their husbands are in combat or have died. Having limited employment opportunities and needing to earn an income for their families, women are frequently forced to enter the **informal sector** or engage in illicit activities.



Liberia Celebrates International Women's Day

Source: UN Photo/Staton Winter

The last significant effect of conflict on women is displacement. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that women and children make up 80 percent of refugees and **internally displaced persons**. The failure of existing mechanisms places refugee women at risk of sexual harassment. They often are subject to human rights abuses, falling victim to traffickers and even being sold into marriage.

“All militias here rape women, to show their strength and to show your weakness. In other places, there is rape because soldiers want a woman. Here, it's that but also a viciousness, a mentality of hatred; and it's women who pay the price.”

—Julienne Chakupewa, Goma, Congo

Source: Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. *Half the Sky*. New York: Vintage, 2010. Print.

Background

Violence Against Women and Girls

In contemporary conflicts, women constitute the minority of combatants but are increasingly impacted the most. Violent acts including torture, individual and mass rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced sterilization, forced impregnation and/or abortion and mutilation have been used against women to shame, terrorize and control communities, drive communities off of certain lands, and purposely spread HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Sexual violence is also used to achieve military and political ends. For example, armed forces may forcibly impregnate women to alter the ethnic makeup of a community. This has occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Rwanda, where women were held against their will until they conceived. Acts of rape are also used as a tool for the humiliation of the defeated men. Male family members are forced to watch as women are raped, the goal being to demoralize them and communicate the message that they have failed in their roles as protectors. Women are also frequently tortured for speaking out against opposing groups and resisting violence against themselves and their families, as has occurred in Sierra Leone, where rebel groups beat, tortured and deprived women of food if they resisted rape. In many cases, women have even been targeted for being educators.

The threat of sexual violence often prevents women from participating in public life, or even performing the daily tasks of getting water and gathering wood and sending their female children to school because they are afraid to leave their homes. Thus, even when women are not directly harmed by violence, gender discrimination is reinforced as they stay inside, causing further isolation and a breakdown of social institutions. Frequently, women are widowed when their husbands die in combat, and are left unarmed and unprotected at a time devoid of community and institutional safeguards. This state of chaos breeds opportunistic sexual violence, meaning that civilians take advantage of the situation by targeting women, knowing that law and order are absent.

CRITICAL THINKING

Many instances of sexual violence go unreported because of social stigma. What can the UN do to encourage women to come forward to seek not only justice, but also treatment?

Often, the effects of sexual violence outlive the conflict as women struggle with sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, and the cultural stigma associated with rape that causes them to be shunned by their communities. Insecurity and **impunity** prevent women from accessing education, becoming financially self-sufficient and participating in government and peace building. While awareness and understanding of violence against women is growing, it is hard to obtain reliable data because the issue is frequently underreported.

Women's and Girls' Health

Conflict situations cause many adverse health effects for women. Women are subject to sexually transmitted infections, fistula, trauma, mutilation, complications from poorly executed abortions, uterine problems and problems giving birth in the future. Because of the destruction of health-care facilities and lack of medical staff and equipment, the most basic needs are not

met. Even where health care is available, women frequently cannot afford it or decide not to seek treatment for fear of being stigmatized and shamed. This is especially harmful to pregnant and nursing women. Poor maternal nutrition leads to high rates of low birth weight, causing increased risk of infant death, impaired immune systems, delayed cognitive development and chronic illness in adulthood. Women are also subject to intense psychological trauma caused by witnessing or experiencing violence, rape, torture and the killing of people close to them. This stress is intensified by damaged infrastructure and resulting lack of access to material and financial resources. In a study conducted in Afghanistan on women living with financial difficulties and fear, 65 percent reported thoughts of suicide.

The Security Council has classified HIV/AIDS as a grave threat to peace and security. In some countries, infection rates among women are four times higher than those among men. In Sierra Leone alone, it is estimated that 70 to 90 percent of rape victims contracted the disease. Gender discrimination prevents women from protecting themselves and adequately responding to the illness. Lack of health and education systems prevent women from obtaining important information, exacerbating the spread of the illness.

“It is now more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in modern wars.”

—Major General Patrick Cammaert
Former UN Peacekeeper



Mother and Child at Community Clinic in Bangladesh

Source: UN Photo/Mark Garten

Socioeconomic Impact

In conflict situations, women are the first to become unemployed and have limited options to provide for their families, and thus may resort to unfavorable measures to earn an income. This lack of resources causes girls to stop attending school so that they too can help provide for the family. They frequently enter the informal sector, taking low-paying jobs such as selling homemade food or providing domestic services. These jobs offer no labor protections and can expose women to exploitation and danger. Women sometimes, in desperation, begin engaging in illicit activities

such as prostitution and drug trafficking. In unstable situations like that in Somalia, women have turned to banditry and looting. Additionally, women are often forced to work for warlords or rebel militias as sex slaves, doing domestic work for soldiers, or carrying supplies and messages between fighting forces. These tasks serve as further humiliation tactics.

In the face of deteriorating food security, women and girls tend to skip meals and begin eating smaller portions to allow men or young children to maintain their nutrition levels. In many instances, women must sell household assets including crops, land, animals and equipment to make ends meet. The situation can become so dire that families knowingly sell their daughters as child brides or to human traffickers.

Displacement

Times of war almost inevitably cause people to become refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). In such cases, women tend to suffer the most. For example, they may be subject to human rights abuses, such as being forced to exchange sex for safe travel to a new location or the acquisition of necessary legal documents. Sometimes, the laws of the host country may force them to return to their own conflict-ridden countries, where they continue to face the same challenges. Women may also be forced to remain in abusive marriages to avoid having their visas withdrawn. Frequently, women are lured into abduction and **human trafficking** by offers of protection or access to safety zones. They are often forced to serve as sex slaves or given to combatants as a reward. This has occurred in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Uganda. Such experiences have severe physical, mental and reproductive health consequences. Because times of conflict cause corruption and the disintegration of infrastructure, law, and order, traffickers are able to function without fear of prosecution or conviction.

The situation in refugee camps is just as dismal. Because of corruption and unequal access to essential resources, women and girls may be sexually exploited by workers in exchange for provisions. In cases of rape, women are often coerced into seeking abortions, which are frequently unsafe. If they do follow through with the pregnancy, their reintegration into society is difficult and sometimes even impossible. Frequently, humanitarian assistance is not based on the actual needs of women, and thus the challenges they face are largely ignored. To perform their daily tasks, women may face the inadequate security offered by camps and have to walk through poorly lit areas or minefields and past military encampments, running a high risk of being raped or killed. The situation is perpetuated by institutional collapse and the resulting lack of protection and assistance.

Current Situation

As it stands, the world is experiencing many civil wars and much ethnic conflict. Poverty and scarce resources continue to be problems, contributing to much of the violence and tension. And women continue to endure the effects. In recent years, much of the world has shifted from the view that violence against women is an inevitable consequence of war and the result of the actions of individual immoral soldiers to the view that such violations are in fact war crimes that need to be addressed. This realization has led to increased awareness in conflict-ridden areas, where special attention must be given to the health and socioeconomic status of



Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon addresses the observance of International Women's Day in 2009, which explored the theme, "Women and Men United to End Violence against Women and Children."

Source: UN Photo/Evan Schneider

women. While these are certainly important steps in the right direction, women still suffer disproportionately to their male counterparts in times of war. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated, “In no other area is our collective failure to ensure effective protection for civilians more apparent...than in terms of the masses of women and girls...whose lives are destroyed each year by sexual violence perpetrated in conflict.” More action is necessary.

The issue of women within current ongoing conflicts takes on an ever-more important role. Efforts have been made through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other programs to improve the lives of women overall. Goal 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women; Goal 5 is to improve maternal health; and Goal 6 advocates combating HIV/AIDS. However, development means very little to women who lack basic human security. For the MDGs related to women to be achieved, more attention must be paid to those women who are adversely affected by conflict.

International Action

The United Nations has adopted significant resolutions regarding women, peace and security. The first was Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000. As the first resolution to recognize the correlation between women and times of conflict, it was a groundbreaking piece of legislation. It calls specifically for the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence in emergency and humanitarian situations, such as in refugee camps. It also develops and delivers education training to peace operations personnel on the rights of women and girls and effective protection measures.

Resolution 1325 further helps to prevent violence against women by promoting women’s rights, accountability and law enforcement through:

- prosecuting those responsible for war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and other violations of international law;
- respecting the civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps;
- excluding sexual violence crimes from amnesty agreements, since they may amount to crimes against humanity, war crimes or genocide;
- strengthening women’s rights under national law; and
- supporting local women’s peace initiatives and conflict resolution processes.

More recently, in 2010, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1960, which creates institutional tools to address the problem of impunity and defines steps for preventing and protecting women from sexual violence stemming from conflict. The incorporation of a “**naming and shaming**” mechanism is important to obtaining justice for victims and acknowledging that sexual violence is a serious human rights violation. A weakness of this resolution is that the list is limited to situations specifically on the Security Council’s agenda.

Many countries have created National Action Plans to implement Resolution 1960, including Austria, Belgium, Chile, Cote D'Ivoire, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Liberia, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Uganda and the United Kingdom. The problem is that many of these plans do not have adequate indicators to ensure their implementation. UNIFEM, now part of UN Women, has supported a multi-country initiative to change this.¹

Many efforts have been undertaken by UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Such efforts have been seen in the UNHCR's consultations with refugee, displaced, and returnee women in the World Food Programme's initiative to have 80 percent of relief food supplies provided directly to women and to have women perform leading roles in distribution efforts. Some efforts have been concentrated regionally. An example is UNIFEM's African Women in Crisis Umbrella Programme, which aims to provide women with technical and economic empowerment skills, including non-traditional activities such as carpentry and construction, as well as training in resource mobilization and advocacy to facilitate the creation of support systems. Another example is the International Organization for Migration Widows Assistance Programme in Cambodia, which provides widows of soldiers and their families vocational and literacy training, as well as access to **microcredit** to help lift them out of poverty.

Recommendations for Creating a Resolution

The impact of armed conflict on women and girls is a very serious and multi-faceted issue. While the need for change has certainly been acknowledged, concrete actions have often been somewhat lacking. Thus, delegates are encouraged to focus on specific steps that the international community can take to ensure that women's rights are protected and their needs are met.

The following questions should be addressed.

- What measures can be taken to ensure stronger enforcement of legislation already in place and to address impunity?
- What are some ways the international community can help prevent women from being forced into taking harmful and degrading jobs?
- How can adequate health-care resources be provided to women in conflict zones?
- What changes can be made to ensure that refugee women are protected and safe in camps?

Questions to Consider

1. Do women enjoy equal status with men in your country? Are there any anti-discrimination laws in place, and are they enforced?
2. Is your country a conflict zone? What are its policies regarding civilians? Are there any special provisions for women?
3. What is the state of law enforcement and infrastructure in your country? Are law and order present and are there functioning health-care facilities?
4. How is your country's economy? Can women find safe and legal sources of income?
5. Is your country a destination for refugees? Are there any protection measures in place?

Research Aid

The UN Women website provides background information on the body and its goals and achievements.

- **UN Women**, <http://www.unwomen.org>

The CIA World Fact Book is a good starting place for background information about your country.

- **The World Fact Book**, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

The website for the NGO Working Group on Women provides information on what NGOs are doing to solve the problems and provides access to information on specific country situations.

- **NGOWG**, <http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/>

The United Nations website provides the full text of Resolutions 1325 and 1960

- **UN**, [www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf/](http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf)
[www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=S/RES/1960\(2010\)](http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=S/RES/1960(2010))

Terms and Concepts

Human trafficking: recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Impunity: freedom from punishment for or the consequences of committing a crime.

Informal sector: the part of a nation's economy made up of small jobs that offer very low wages and that lack security, possibility for advancement and protection of labor laws.

Internally displaced person: persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border.

Microcredit: loans provided to poor families to start small businesses and lift themselves out of poverty.

Naming and shaming: making it publically known that a person, organization or country is a perpetrator of some form of crime.

References

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