



POSITION PAPER

Women in Armed Conflict

Women and children are the most vulnerable and affected by war, the effects of which have long term economic, social and psychological consequences. In addition to the general atrocities against humanity that comes with war and conflict, women and children in particular are subjected to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence inflicted as a war tactic adopted by militia to annihilate familial, community and societal structures.¹ Rape as a war tool is used to break the morale of citizens under siege, break up families, and to even deliberately infect women with HIV². Research has shown that rape incidences rise when armed conflict is present. The Democratic Republic of Congo, which has been in constant conflict since the 1990s, has earned the title of the “Rape Capital of the World”.³

For decades women have been excluded from participating in peace processes and, the predicament of women and children in violent conflict viewed as unavoidable spoils of war. In 2000, the UN formally acknowledged that peace was intricately linked to gender equality and poverty reduction, highlighting the pivotal role that women play in “conflict management, conflict resolution, and sustainable peace”.⁴ In the adoption of resolution 1325 in 2000, the UN brought into focus the importance of women’s involvement in efforts towards prevention and resolution of armed conflicts as an essential element of the promotion and maintenance of peace and security.

[Resolution 1325](#) specifically calls “on Member States to increase the participation of women in the "prevention and resolution of conflicts" and in the "maintenance and promotion of peace and security." It calls upon parties involved in armed conflict to abide by international laws that protect the rights of civilian women and girls and to incorporate policies and procedures that protect women from gender-based crimes such as rape and sexual assault.”⁵

[Wezeshha](#), an African diaspora led organization that aims to promote and empower African women and children that have experienced conflict and poverty, conducted a study⁶ focused on African refugees in Ireland and how their experiences have impacted their current health and life. The study confirmed the continued vulnerability that women who have endured conflict and sexual violence experience. Even after leaving conflict zones, women affected by sexual violence and conflict have many unmet health and mental problems. They are faced with discrimination, isolation, culture and language barriers in host countries. It is also often very difficult for them to acquire health assistance and also lack the proper psychosocial support. Wezeshha aims to bring a new understanding of the challenges and perceptions that women from conflict areas face. We strives to find new means to provide better help to women who have experienced conflict and sexual violence

¹Peterman, A., Palermo, T., and Bredenkamp, C.2011. *Estimates and determinants of sexual violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo*. in American Journal of Public Health, vol. 101, no. 6 (2011): 1060–1067

²Human immunodeficiency virus

³ “UN official calls DR Congo 'rape capital of the world.'". BBC. 2010-04-28. Retrieved 2016-07-24.

⁴ http://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325#Why_is_Resolution_1325_important_.

⁵ “Rwanda, Genocide, Hutu, Tutsi, Mass Execution, Ethnic Cleansing, Massacre, Human Rights, Victim Remembrance, Education, Africa.” UN News Center. UN. Web. 31 May 2016.

⁶ HEALING THE WOUNDS OF WAR Narratives of Women from Armed Conflict. Report accessible at: http://wezeshadada.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/healing_the_wounds_of_war.pdf

in order to enable them to gain access to the requisite service interventions and live happy and fulfilling lives again.