

Five Steps for Sustainable Prevention of Sexual Violence in Conflict

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has been a persistent threat to the lives of women, men, boys, and girls in fragile and crisis contexts for generations. The legal precedence established in the tribunals of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and in the statutes of the International Criminal Court (ICC), together with policy developments emanating from United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and 1820 and the Murad Code¹ have been groundbreaking. These legislative milestones are necessary but not sufficient to prevent or address the complex and traumatic effects of CRSV. Other sectors and stakeholders have a role and responsibility.

Drawing on two decades of research and practice by women-led organizations specializing in women, peace and security issues and as first responders to sexual violence in fragile contexts, the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) presents the following practical guidance to inform governments and policymakers committed to effective prevention of sexual violence in conflict (PSVI).



1. Inclusive and robust diplomacy to prevent, mitigate and resolve conflict and support local peacebuilding is essential for the prevention of conflict related sexual violence. This includes:

- Ensuring strong emphasis on negotiations to prevent the rise and escalation of conflict and standardizing the participation of women peacebuilders with expertise and practical experience in addressing CRSV/PSVI issues in political, security, humanitarian analysis, negotiations and design/delivery of services. They are the first to know and act and have the trust of survivors to identify solutions;
- Addressing CRSV in the context of ceasefire and security negotiations to reduce incidences of sexual abuse in the context of humanitarian passage (per existing UN guidance); and

¹ <https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/launch-of-code-of-conduct-for-gathering-using-information-on-conflict-related-sexual-violence>

- Drawing on existing networks of women mediators (e.g. Women Mediators across the Commonwealth) to establish a standby capacity for the deployment of investigative teams to address CRSV and determine effective means of mitigation, mediation, and documentation for prosecution and/or referral to the ICC.

Best Practice: By 2015 the Colombian peace process included women as 20% of the government negotiating team and 43% of the FARC delegates. The resulting Peace Agreement (2016) consists of a series of accords including a gender-based approach to implementation. Their introduction clearly states: "This structural transformation also requires greater gender equality through the adoption of specific measures to guarantee that men and women are involved in and benefit from implementation of this Agreement on an equal basis."

2. Prevention of sexual violence in conflict, humanitarian and refugee settings, including by:

- Mandating major humanitarian agencies to develop and implement sexual violence prevention strategies in the design and delivery of emergency aid and shelter, and report on impact;
- Ensuring that women are consulted and included in the design and monitoring of strategies; and
- Funding and training 10,000 counselors per country across women's organizations, scaling up safe and accessible direct and mobile counseling services to 90,000 survivors of CRSV and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including in marginalized and provincial communities.

3. Prevention of sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by military and security forces including peacekeepers, including by:

- Providing systematic training and doctrine pertaining PSVI, and rape as a war crime;
- Identifying and expanding good practices, such as the UK's community policing programs and integration of human security experts and gender advisers in military and peacekeeping operations;
- Strengthening investigations and prosecution of alleged SEA;
- Establishing a charter on the commitment of PSVI by security personnel and a rapid response working group in partnership with women's rights and peace organizations to close the gap on lack of awareness among security sector actors regarding states commitments to PSVI, ICC statutes, Murad Code, and related norms; and
- Compiling, translating into local languages, and disseminating information about existing laws and policies on PSVI and CRSV through state and civil society entities, including social media, animations, and other media.

Best Practice: Hamsatu Allamin, Founder and Director of the Allamin Foundation for Peace and Development in Nigeria, has integrated 830 survivors of Boko Haram into local communities. Because many survivors have experienced sexual violence perpetrated by the military, she engaged the director of civil-military relations and aims to organize dialogues between survivors and the military. She's working towards legislation to hold perpetrators accountable for children born of sexual violence.

Best Practice: Robinah Rubimbwa, Founder and Director of the Coalition for Action on 1325 (CoACT 1325) in Uganda and member of the Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth, established a PSVI working group with the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) and the police. They monitor sexual violence in the country, document best practices in prevention, challenges and emerging issues, and recommend strategic actions to the government and police force.

4. Ensure "Dignity beyond Victimhood" by providing social justice for survivors and children born of rape. This includes:

- Given that legal prosecutions for CRSV are limited, expanding the definition of justice to include social and economic justice for victims and survivors. This should include reparations, access to healthcare, education, economic livelihood, and security in their communities to enable them to move beyond their victimhood, reclaim their dignity and life;
- Prioritizing mental health and psychosocial support services, along with healthcare, legal, and livelihoods, for all survivors, particularly marginalized groups such as refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs); and
- Scaling up these services across fragile and conflict-affected environments.

Best Practice: Neem Foundation in Nigeria takes a holistic approach in reintegrating over 30,000 women and children from Boko Haram into the community. With a mobile counseling service, Neem addresses mental health through expressive arts therapy and establishing sustainable community mental health support groups. They also promote social cohesion, by meeting with local leaders to reduce stigma and increase awareness.





5. Tackle the Culture of Impunity with a "Shift the Shame and Fear" campaign:

- National and global campaigns could be initiated with renowned public figures to speak out against sexual violence, stand with survivors and actively engage key societal influencers (e.g. clerics, elders, sports figures etc.) in the prevention of sexual violence.

Best Practice: Hassina Neekzad, Founder and Director of the Afghan Women's Organization for Equality (AWOE), engaged men to examine gender roles and their understanding of various forms of violence and peace through dialogue. This exchange resulted in the establishment of a network of 89 men which helps to resolve local conflict, promote women's roles in political and public life, and recognize signs of and mitigate sexual and other violence against women.