

Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War in Syria

Whether used to instill fear, humiliate, or punish; destroy lives, families and communities; or enforce social order and power dynamics, rape and other forms of sexual violence have been widely documented in the Syrian conflict. The strategic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in violation of international law is of course not unique to Syria, but its widespread nature and protracted impacts have often gone underreported and unaddressed amidst the myriad other atrocities of the Syrian conflict. Moreover, while rape and other forms of sexual violence have been recognized as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and elements of genocide - as well as serious violations of human rights, including the prohibition on torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment - the widespread lack of accountability perpetuates the cycle of violence and division.

In this podcast, we speak with leading experts and practitioners about the strategic use sexual violence was a weapon of war in Syria. We'll discuss the how sexual violence has been used against women, girls, boys and men in Syria by government forces and armed groups, and what impact it has had on survivors, and their families and communities. We'll also discuss how humanitarian actors can better assist survivors inside Syria and in situations of displacement, how perpetrators can be held accountable, and the longer term implications for peace. Key questions include:

- How prevalent has sexual violence been as a weapon of war in Syria? What are its root causes, and what impacts has it had on individuals, communities and the conflict at large?
- How can humanitarian actors better respond to the needs of those affected by sexual violence in Syria and in situations of displacement?
- How has international law evolved to criminalize wartime sexual violence, and how can perpetrators be held accountable?
- How have grassroots organizations in Syria organized to respond to sexual violence, and what are the implications for the peace process?

Featuring expert commentary from:

- Laila Alodaat: MENA Director, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Lina Biscaia: Former analyst, International Commission of Inquiry on Syria
- Marie Forestier: Independent researcher and journalist focusing on conflict-affected countries

Resources:

- Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, "I lost my dignity": Sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic; Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/37/CRP.3 (8 March 2018), <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria/A-HRC-37-CRP-3.pdf>.
- Forestier, Marie, "You want freedom? this is your freedom": rape as a tactic of the Assad regime. LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series, Kirby, Paul and Shepherd, Laura J. (eds.) 3/2017. Centre for Women, Peace & Security, London, UK, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/69475/1/Forestier_You_want_freedom_this_is_your_freedom_WP3_2017.pdf.
- Biscaia, Lina, "Sexual Violence in Syria: Acting on What we Know." INTLAWGRRRLS, 11 April 2018, <http://www.atha.se/blog/sexual-violence-syria-acting-what-we-know>.