IRIN WEB SPECIAL

*September 2004*

# *Our Bodies - Their Battle Ground: Gender-based Violence in Conflict Zones*

***IRIN Web Special on violence against women and girls during and after conflict.***

In times of crisis or disaster, humanitarian workers and governments need an accurate account of events and situations on the ground. An information service that focuses on a daily basis on humanitarian issues in Africa, Central Asia and Iraq, IRIN seeks to satisfy that need. Our aim is to bridge the information gap between decision makers, humanitarian workers and the people they are trying to help.

*For more information on our services visit our website at:* ***www.IRINnews.org***

# inside this issue

# 1. Overview

**Gender-based violence: A silent, vicious epidemic September 2004**

Globally, hundreds of thoudands of women carry the physical and mental wounds of sexual violence. Credit: IRIN

As Elizabeth and her captors arrived at the militia camp, she realized that dozens of other girls had also been kidnapped. "When we got there we were so many," she said. "We were taken into the bush, when a big man came and took me."

Life with the Mayi Mayi, an ethnic milita, was a nightmare of almost continuous abuse. "All they did was come and 'take' us often. They used to tie up the women and tie their husbands to trees then take us [the girls]," the 17-year-old told IRIN." I stayed with them for so long and it didn't matter any more who took me."

Elizabeth's ordeal happened in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), but it could well have been in Sierra Leone, Liberia or a variety of other countries. Wherever there is armed conflict, there are stories like hers, stories of rape, of trauma; stories of unimaginable horror, of girls and women who have been gang-raped, held indefinitely as sex-slaves, beaten, mutilated, killed. Sometimes the victims are in their 70s or 80s, sometimes they are younger women, or teenagers. Some are as young as six months old.

Social workers and aid professionals working against gender-based violence (GBV) are overwhelmed with cases of violations as indiscriminate as they are vicious. One young mother in eastern DRC told IRIN about the time she went home to find a paramilitary raping her 10 month-old baby. In Liberia, a worker at a non-governmental organization helping rape victims said that during 14 years of vicious civil war, tens of thousands of women were assaulted. "Even the old were raped here," she said.

## Unprepared for the "searing magnitude" of the problem

Despite their considerable knowledge and experience, even gender experts Elizabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, "were completely unprepared for the searing magnitude of what we saw and heard in the conflict and post-conflict areas we visited" as they assessed the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building in various countries.

They knew the data, they said in a 2002 report titled Women War and Peace, in which they recorded their findings; they had read reports, "but knowing all this did not prepare us for the horrors women described". Despite the scarcity of data, the few statistics that women's groups have managed to patch together illustrate the scourge of gender-based violence only too well. An estimated half a million women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. A staggering 50% of all women in Sierra Leone were subjected to sexual violence, including rape, torture and sexual slavery, according to a 2002 report by Physicians for Human Rights. In Liberia, an estimated 40 percent of all girls and women have fallen victim to abuse. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s, between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped.

Indeed, wherever there has been conflict - whether it's the DRC, Algeria, Myanmar, Sudan, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, East Timor or Kosovo - violence against women has reached epidemic proportions. Many researchers feel this is not just the result of violent male opportunism, but rather a weapon of war. This is particularly true of ethnic conflicts, during which systematic rape is commonly used to destabilise populations and destroy community and family bonds. Amnesty International now considers rape a commonly used as a tool for "ethnic cleansing", including the forced impregnation of girls.

Rape is also used to humiliate and demoralise families and communities. In many cases men are forced to watch the rape of their wives or daughters. In Bosnia-Herzegovina sons and fathers were forced to commit sexual atrocities against each other.

Current reports from DRC and Darfur in western Sudan suggest there this no reason to believe the 'epidemic' is near ending. Aid agencies and human rights bodies such as Amnesty International and Save the Children have been recording unabated and widespread sexual attacks in Darfur despite the presence of international observers, and thousands of aid workers. In some of these attacks Arab militias also force female genital mutilation upon their non-Arab victims. In such cases, rape and sexual abuse no longer appear to be the result of male opportunism or the breakdown of social and moral systems caused by war but a deliberate effort to wreck a people and their culture.

## What is Gender Based Violence?

According the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the term 'gender-based violence' (GBV) is used to distinguish violence that targets individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender from other forms of violence. GBV includes violent acts such as rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, forced impregnation and murder. When involving women, GBV is violence that is directed against a woman or girl because she is female, or that affects women disproportionately.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) considers that the term 'gender-based' provides a new context for understanding violence against women because it reflects the unequal power relationship between women and men in society.


A mother tells IRIN how her 10-month-old baby was raped by a soldier.
Credit: IRIN

This does not mean that all acts against a woman are gender-based violence, or that all victims of gender-based violence are female.

The term 'sexual violence' is used to denote sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. It refers to any act, attempt, or threat of a sexual nature that results, or is likely to result in, physical, psychological and emotional harm. Sexual violence is therefore a form of gender-based violence.

## The growth of a movement

While GBV can be said to have been present in society since earliest recorded history, it is only in the past 10 years that it has been defined as and declared an international human rights issue, according to Jeanne Ward, a gender-based-violence expert with the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium (RHRC). Ward explains in her 2002 report, If Not Now, When? Addressing Gender-based Violence in Refugee, Internally Displaced, and Post-conflict Settings, that these changes are due to the rise of the women's and human rights movements across the world that demanded that violence against women be considered an affront to basic human rights.

But it is the rising number of cases of GBV and the wide-scale use of sexual violence in on-going armed conflicts around the world that command the world's attention and drive an increased demand to see change. The increased media attention on issues of sexual violence and the establishment of a defined humanitarian sector have led to greater interest in the development of legal instruments and institutions that promote and reinforce international standards of human rights.

The effect of the increased focus on GBV has been both positive and negative. Many more aid agencies, donors and local organizations have now included GBV as part, or the main focus, of their activities, resulting in more money and attention.

However, GBV experts who have been working on the issue for many years are cautious of this sudden interest, which they fear may be short-lived. Sophie Read-Hamilton of the International Rescue Committee in Liberia told IRIN that "when an issue gets sexy it doesn't help". She explained that if support systems are not in place for the victims "you can drown in funding that's not well used". People do not see results for all the funds spent, so they can dry up, then nobody benefits. But, at the end of the day, the legal frameworks and humanitarian assistance for victims count for very little if the authorities in places where the crimes are committed lack the power, or will, to act.

## No-risk environments for perpetrators

Universally, gender-based violence goes largely unpunished. During conflict, violence against women becomes an excepted norm while militarisation and the increased presence of weapons result in high levels of brutality and even greater levels of impunity.

Fighting the reality of impunity is critical to the reduction of GBV. At present, those committing violations in conflicts or post-conflict environments run virtually no risk of investigation let alone prosecution and punishment. Local authorities in eastern DRC told IRIN that, despite many thousands of cases of violent sexual abuse, they knew of only one man being prosecuted. He was later acquitted. A combination of social and political disorder, absence of rule of law, corruption, the lack of an impartial or functioning judiciary, and fear allow these crimes to be committed with almost total impunity. Perpetrators act in a no-risk environment.

Even those trusted to keep the peace and offer stability - UN peacekeepers - are sometimes accused of sexual violations, but generally evade prosecution.

Lyn Lusi, founder of a clinic for sexually abused women in Goma, eastern DRC, feels the constant publicity of the failure of the government to apprehend those who commit the violations only fuels the problem. "Unfortunately I don't think the problem is reduced despite all the publicity it's getting," she told IRIN, "…all that publicity is saying 'there's impunity, there's impunity'. There's nothing to frighten people … now they know they can do it without paying the consequences". Since the end of the fighting in Goma, her clinic continues to receive new cases of rape, but "the girls are younger and younger", she said.

## International agreements and frameworks

The defining of the international community's responsibilities in response to gender inequality and sexual violence was slow until recent years. Although statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex appeared in the original Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, it is only in the last decade that the issue of sexual violence in conflict has been addressed rigorously.

Various international agreements have sought to address the issue of sexual vulnerability of women in war, most notably, additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. But the Rome Statue of

the International Criminal Court in 1998 marked a turning point: it declared for the first time that "rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, and other forms of sexual violence of comparative gravity" are to be considered war crimes. If these acts are knowingly committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population, they constitute "crimes against humanity", it said.

Whatever laws are drafted internationally, however, the facts on the ground remain stark, with no improvement in sight. In Rwanda it is said that almost every adolescent girl who survived the genocide of 1994 had been raped. The World Health Organization says gender-based violence accounts for more death and disability among women aged 15-44 years than cancer, malaria, traffic injuries and war combined. As long as there is no real progress on addressing the culture of impunity that surrounds sexual violence, the number of women medically and psychologically scarred for life will increase as the epidemic continues unrestrained.

## 2. Rape as a tool of war

In Liberia an estimated 40% of women and girls have experienced some form of sexual violence. Credit: IRIN

The sexual abuse of women in war is nothing new and has long been tolerated as one of the inevitable features of military conflict. That in itself has been a cause for concern among human rights advocates. However, the large-scale use of rape as an instrument for delivering a psychological blow during armed conflict has caused even more concern.

The use of rape as an organised and systematic weapon of war, employed to destabilise and threaten an element of the civilian population is a phenomenon that the international community must address with greater vigour, Sarah Maguire, UK-based lawyer and human rights consultant, told IRIN.

In recent years, mass rape in war has been documented in various countries, including Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Uganda. A European Community fact-finding team estimated that more than 20,000 Muslim women were raped during the war in Bosnia. At least 250,000, perhaps as many as 500,000 women were systematically raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, according to reports from the World Bank and UNIFEM. Most recently in Darfur, Western Sudan, displaced people have described a pattern of systematic and unlawful attacks against civilians by a government-sponsored Arab militia and the Sudanese military forces.

Women and girls are singled out because the harm and humiliation inflicted not only hurts them, but also deeply harms and affects the men in the targeted community, Maguire told IRIN. Such sexual violation of women erodes the fabric of a community in a way that few weapons can.

"This kind of systematic rape is an effort to humiliate the targeted community," Maguire said. "Although it involves women, it's specifically aimed at the men of that community. This type of rape is about 'cleansing' or changing the ethnic makeup of a group, which in my opinion is tantamount to genocide."

Such horrors were seen in Bosnia, where Muslim women were systematically raped as part of the "ethnic cleansing" campaign by Serb forces. Over 20,000 women are thought to have been raped during the war in order to humiliate and intimidate Bosnian Muslims; they were forcibly impregnated with half-Serbian children in order to dilute the Bosniak identity in the former Yugoslav republics, according to the United Nations Women's Fund, UNIFEM.

Maguire cited a report by UNIFEM, in which women's bodies were described as being 'used as an envelope from one group of men to another'. "Those committing the atrocities were effectively saying 'we're going to kill you, or destroy your capacity to breed'," she said.

### Preventative action

While the outlook was bleak, Maguire maintained that much could be done at both the local and the international level to prevent and discourage the use of rape as a weapon in conflict, and to mitigate the effects of it within a targeted community.

More could be done to communicate the issue to warring factions, she said. "We must, as a community, make it clear that the use of rape in war is a breach of International Humanitarian Law and international conventions. We must treat it as a priority, and references should be made in every Security Council resolution, and in every indictment," she said.

Monitoring and reporting was also crucial, yet often challenging to put in place. Too often, the international community has had to acquiesce when belligerents refused to accept certain measures, such

as the deployment of human rights monitors into a crisis, she said.

Maguire maintained that a new frame of reference for sexual violence was overdue. "Perhaps we need to start talking about sexual violence as a threat to international peace and security. That might affect our perception of the issue," she said.

"Part of the problem is that sexual violence is not unique to conflict situations. It also occurs in peaceful societies, therefore we tend to be more accepting of it than we would of the burning of houses, which is clearly linked to conflict. We have, as a society, a level of acceptability about rape. It happens. It's collateral damage. However, this means that we need to have a more energetic response to it," said Maguire.

Her statements were backed up by a UNIFEM report: "Violence against women in wartime is a reflection of violence against women in peacetime. As long as violence against women is pervasive and accepted, stress, small arms proliferation and a culture of violence push violence against women to epidemic proportions, especially when civilians are the main targets of warfare." [The report, titled Women, War, Peace and Violence Against Women, is available at www.womenwarpeace.org]

Comfort Lamptey, gender advisor with the United Nation's Department of Peace-Keeping Operations (DPKO) in New York, told IRIN that a legal process as a means of tackling the pervasive culture of impunity was crucial.

"A legal response in terms of prosecution, truth and reconciliation, can redress crimes and serve as a deterrent," she said. To this end, the Rome Treaty, which established the International Criminal Court in 2000, had been fundamental in underlining rape as a crime against humanity.

A young woman in Goma, blinded by her rapists to prevent identification, tries to rebuild her life 2 years after the event.
Credit: IRIN

The ultimate aim was to discourage the belligerents from conducting a proxy war through their women. "The challenge is to communicate to men that sexual violence, and rape in particular, should not serve as a weapon of war," she said.

## The importance of psychosocial support

Maguire added that there was also a need for psycho-social support, in coping with the trauma of such attacks. Sometimes just asking the right questions could be crucial. While serving as a lawyer in the UK defending asylum cases, Maguire recalled a Kurdish woman who complained of daily migraines for five years following an armed raid on her home and the torture of her husband. While the case had focused on the attack on her husband, no-one had thought to ask his wife if she had been maltreated. She had in fact been gang-raped, yet had never spoken of it. "She stopped having the headaches soon after," said Maguire.


A young woman in Goma, blinded by her rapists to prevent identification, tries to rebuild her life 2 years after the event.
Credit: IRIN

"People need a channel to discuss these things. We, as a community, need to treat the use of rape with the same level of intolerability as we do when we see houses being destroyed, or children killed in conflict," she said.

Maguire referred to what she saw as a resistance within the international community to take on these psycho-social activities - partly because they seemed intangible, but also due to a common perception that rape was an "unavoidable" and "inevitable" element of conflict.

Lamptey agreed that there was a need to improve the mechanisms to support women confronted with such traumas, the dilemmas of unwanted children, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, or being rejected by their community or husband.

A survey in 2000 by Avega, an umbrella association in Rwanda that caters for the interest of 25,000 widows whose husbands were massacred during the 1994 genocide, found that two-thirds of the women were living with HIV/AIDS, while 80 percent were still seriously traumatized by the horrors and brutality they suffered during the genocide, UNIFEM reported.

Persistent sexual violence can also numb the targeted individual or community to other abuse or exploitation. Lamptey cited one situation during the protracted civil war in Sierra Leone where a young girl who had been abducted by rebels in Sierra Leone, had been released and was living as a prostitute. She considered herself fortunate as she was now being paid.

Lamptey said there were opportunities to influence attitudes to sexual violence and confront conflicts where systematic rape had become ubiquitous. "In Darfur, for example, what are the terms of reference for the monitors of the African Union? And will this include monitoring compliance with human rights issues, and sexual violence?"

## Protecting displaced women

A particular area of concern for the humanitarian community is sexual violence against displaced women and children and the need to re-establish, as quickly as possible, structures and systems to ensure their safety in displaced settlements. Maguire cited examples of displaced communities in Darfur that opted to send women rather than men out to collect firewood. While they ran the risk of being raped or attacked by the roaming militias, their men would

most certainly be killed, she said.

"It's a hugely difficult environment," Maguire said. "But we need to start asking ourselves how we can provide these displaced women with all that they need, to avoid having them run the daily risk of leaving these camps. We need to start thinking about how we can keep these women safe."

### Masculinity and Gender-Based Violence

The inequities of gender relations are at the core of sexual violence and depend on perceptions of male and female roles in society and the social structures around this, Lamptey told IRIN. "In cultures that see women as the property of a man, then an affront on women is an attack at the man," she said.

Changing the mindset of people is key. "If we go to the heart of where this comes from - it relates to the notions of masculinity, sexual violence is still about men fighting men, they are just using the vessel of a woman's body. Fundamentally, it's about a lack of respect for women and their bodies as equals," said Lamptey.

There are also other factors such as poverty and economic instability, which have resulted in a "crisis of masculinity" in many parts of the world, according to analysis by UNIFEM. Men's traditional roles have been threatened and rather than finding alternate roles, men have in some cases sought to assert their masculinity "through irresponsible sexual behaviour or domestic violence".

What is positive however is that the approach to gender-based violence and the implications of masculinity have begun to change. It is now recognized that from an early age, a preconceived mould of masculinity is imposed on boys and men, just as stereotypes of femininity are imposed on girls and women. And as men change, entire cultures can begin to change, laying the foundations for a richer lifestyle, UNIFEM reported.

## 3. What the humanitarians are doing

Coordinator of the NGO Synergy; Justine Masika Bihamba. Credit: IRIN

Helping traumatised women raped in war is no easy task. It is something that involves a wide range of individuals and bodies, including humanitarians, non-governmental organizations and gender-based violence (GBV) experts.

"Because rape is so stigmatised and there is so much shame and blame, the basic principle of any rape service must be to guarantee confidentiality to women or they won't come forward," Sophie Read-Hamilton, GBV coordinator for the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Liberia, told IRIN, highlighting just one of the many difficulties.

How GBV comes about is one of the basic questions experts in the field have explored extensively in recent years. Jeanne Ward noted in a report titled If Not Now, When? - first published in 2002 - that the stimulus for GBV, particularly for sexual crimes committed in armed conflict, varied.

"Sexual violence can be capricious or random, resulting from a breakdown in social and moral systems," Ward said in the report, written for the Reproductive Health for Refugees in Conflict Consortium (RHRC). "In addition, it may be systematic, in order to destabilise populations and destroy bonds within communities, advance ethnic cleansing, express hatred for the enemy, or supply combatants with sexual services," she said. Ward highlighted the examples of Bosnia/Herzegovina and Rwanda in the 1990s. In Bosnia, she said, "public rape of women and girls preceded the flight or expulsion of entire Muslim populations from their villages," while in Rwanda, Hutu extremists encouraged mass rape of Tutsi women "as an expression of contempt, which sometimes included intentional HIV transmissions".

Ward said that up until a decade ago, most GBV committed during periods of armed conflict had been condoned or ignored - a function of deeply embedded cultural assumptions that "acquiesce to the inevitability of violence and the exploitation of women and girls". However, "recent international interrelated events have brought gender-based violence in armed conflict, as well as in refugee, internally displaced and post-conflict settings, into starker relief".

The humanitarians currently working at the grass roots level to directly address GBV are a relatively small group. They work for organizations such as the American Refugee Committee, CARE, Christian Children's Fund, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Medical Corps, IRC and Medicins sans Frontieres, and local organizations, to name but a few. These organizations often provide direct services to victims in the field. UN bodies often support them by providing financial, policy and other important services. They operate in countries at war or just recovering from war such as Afghanistan, countries in the Balkans, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Guinea, Iraq, Liberia, Myanmar and Sierra Leone. Their work provides the basis for understanding the challenges and limitations to confronting and reducing violence.

## Collecting data

GBV specialists say one of the first questions concerned people often ask is what is the nature and extent of GBV and what is its impact on individuals and communities. Questions that involve data, such as 'How many women and girls are affected?' are, the specialists say, often the hardest to answer.


Women at the DOCS centre for victims of sexual violence, in Goma, preparing food for patients. Credit: IRIN

Read-Hamilton of the IRC said data collection was more about "getting an accurate picture of what women are facing," which is not easy. She says she always tries to find out what data is needed, why, and how its integrity will be guaranteed. There is also an ethical issue: "It's not OK to ask about experiences of rape if you're not prepared to help them," she told IRIN. For Ward, an important issue revolves around who is gathering the data and how reliable it is. " There are few very good GBV specific programmes that collect data in a systematic manner and then monitor that data to try to inform programming," she told IRIN.

"What happens is that most programming is based on anecdotes and one of the challenges for programmes is that they have to define what they want to collect data on," she said, "and the employees need fairly sophisticated training on documentation, that includes, at minimum, what the definitions of gender-based violence are, what the critical components of the data collection are, and how to put that data together and monitor it. After the monitoring, how do you use the information to consider how to adjust programming?"

Ward said most information was collected by service groups who were not trained to collect prevalence data that would give a more accurate picture of what the entire population is seeing. "You have a service-specific sample …whilst service statistics are critically important, it's my feeling that population-based data leads more directly to policy changes so it needs to be done," she said.

Thus asking the simple question of what has happened to survivors often gives a complicated answer. Obtaining a simple answer to the question 'How many women have been victimised during the DRC conflict?' for example, is impossible. According to Ward, it is possible to obtain data in a technically sophisticated way, and she herself has been involved in designing methodologies in a number of countries, from Rwanda to Colombia. Although it is expensive, she says that "good methodology builds local capacity and good data packs a huge wallop with policy makers and the public…".

## The issue of confidentiality

Women's reluctance to report a sexual attack because of the stigma attached makes it difficult for the nature and scope of the problem to be understood, Read-Hamilton says. The experience of one 21-year-old rape victim from the town of Goma, in eastern DRC, illustrates this only too well. The woman told IRIN she wished she had not told her husband of her ordeal because after the gang-rape by "bandits", he abandoned her, leaving her and her children destitute.

According to Ward, "We're talking about coding information so you're not revealing things about the survivor. You have to be sure to impress upon people the need for confidentiality, not only for the survivor but for the service provider.

Ward would like programmes to standardise the use of 'release of information authorisation forms', which she says should be standard but are not. "In conflict settings it can be even more critical, in terms of survivor safety, to ensure confidentiality." This is because of the on-going risk to survivors by armed men and other perpetrators who may be acting with impunity.

## Who is doing what?

According to Ward, most international NGOs, which may have access to the kinds of funds necessary to support or build local programmes, have only one or two GBV programmes on the ground. "Of all the NGOs, I would say that the IRC has the most programmes on the ground around the world. And they have only 10 or 11 programmes in humanitarian settings," she says. "Most international NGOs specifically targeting gender-based violence are providing psychosocial and health response to survivors, with community education components," she adds.

Of the situation in eastern DRC, where countless thousands of women have been victim of sexual violence, Juliane Kippenberg of Human Rights Watch (HRW) told IRIN: "It has taken a while for funds, whether from the UN or from a government level, to trickle down. …. It's taken a long time for it to arrive on the ground [to address GBV].

Small, locally-based NGOs do the best they can with few or no resources, according to Kippenberg, the co-author of a 2002 report 'The War Within a War' on sexual violence against women and girls in eastern Congo: "Smaller local women's rights groups are the actors on the ground who know the situation and who have networks, but they do not always have funding. It's sometimes shocking," she told IRIN.

"One woman victim [in eastern Congo] set up an organization to house women - she had several houses where victims who were homeless could stay. She approached me for about US $800 to pay the rent," she said.

In eastern DRC, three very committed groups provide first-hand support to survivors. But they are not part of the larger picture that informs policy makers.

**PAIF** (Promotion et Appui aux Initiatives Feminines) in Goma and region is an association promoting women's rights. Its focus is in the provinces of North and South Kivu, Maniema and Orientale. The small organization carries out a number of functions, from research and training to offering support to victims of violence. It is part of a larger organization that offers women training in management, micro-credit and skills acquisition. Its small office is a gathering place for women who have suffered during the war and need a place to talk, share and receive counselling. The workers have served as mediators between couples, often when the husband has rejected his "violated wife" as being defiled and therefore untouchable.

**Synergie** des Femmes pour les Victimes des Violences Sexuelles (SFVF) is based in Goma and works in the North Kivu area. It primarily works on three components of the GBV problem: the psychosocial - it has 75 counsellors providing therapy, training and family mediation; medical support with the help of other facilities such as the DOCS (Doctors on Call for Service) hospital, handling 1,450 cases in the past year; and research on subjects such as women's rights, preventative actions and judicial actions when the victims want to charge their violators in the criminal courts.

**SOPROP** (Solidarite pour la Promotion Sociale et la Paix) is also in Goma. Its activities include the provision of legal and psychosocial support to victims, education on women's rights, grassroot development programmes, including skills training, and ongoing monitoring of women's rights. All of these groups receive small amounts of financial support from organizations such as Amnesty International, HRW and a variety of international donors. However, their work seems to be done on an ad hoc basis, with lots of local coordination, but little by way of international connections. According to GBV specialists, this is not sustainable in the long run.

"One of the challenges of the GBV community is to develop participatory and sustainable programmes that remain even after the humanitarian crisis is over and the international humanitarian agencies have left the area. The problem is that humanitarian funding is typically not linked to development funding, so when emergency funding ends, many GBV programmes run by international NGOs shut down. We saw this in Bosnia and East Timor," Ward said.

Kippenberg agreed: "I do forsee that if the situation [in eastern DRC] gets better, this might be a problem because the impact on women is so long-term, over several generations. It will be a huge challenge to assist the victims, their families and children," she told IRIN.

## Working with judicial systems

A female magistrate in Goma described to IRIN the difficulties a woman faces in getting a complaint of rape through the court system. She said the accused could bribe a magistrate to drop the case - an offer that was all too often accepted. There could also be pressure put on women and girls to drop the charges. Justine Masika Bihamba, the director of Synergie, told IRIN how difficult it was for the organization to get a case through the court system. Nevertheless, she said, her workers persisted in trying.

Kippenberg , referring to the situation in eastern DRC, said one encouraging sign was the conviction last year by a military court of a soldier to 10 years in jail for raping a six-year-old girl. She said it was also very important that the International Criminal Court, established in 2002, had begun investigations into war crimes and crimes against humanity in the DRC, which would include crimes of sexual violence. One of the huge problems, she said, was that many attacks on women had been carried out by armed groups, and prosecuting these was impossible.

"Justice [for victims of sexual violence in eastern DRC] has a long way to go," Kippenberg said. "But it is worth investing in. Donors must think about how they can assist victims to go to court and take action. This is something the donor community can focus on."

Ward is blunt on the shortcomings of the legal sector in helping victims of sexual violence. "Theoretically the legal/justice sector has an obligation to respond to the cases reported and ensure safe prosecution. In many of these settings the statutory and civil laws are not necessarily supportive of women's rights so there may be no protections in the law or they are quite limited. And the system isn't often working in the midst of conflict…some countries have special courts like Sri Lanka and Rwanda that try war-related sexual violence. You have the international courts that try a very few cases, but survivor support is limited."

Ward says that in some countries, GBV projects have provided training and sensitisation for the judiciary, for lawyers and police, and have investigated how the laws are applied and how the judiciary functions. She points to an OSCE report on Kosovo that exposed the limitations of the judicial system in responding to the survivor: "There's lots of stigmatisation of victims, but after the kind of investigations like the one done by OSCE, there is the opportunity to make recommendations for change to the official bodies - like setting up advocates and protocols for protection. It's a place to start. What needs to happen is to have an emergency response protocol that involves reviewing legislation and its application in countries like Sudan, the DRC," she says.

If there is a functioning judiciary, Ward says, at the very least there have to be "free legal services or women can't even start the process…".

***Related Links:*** *Gender Based Violence (GBV) Resources, info@rhrc.ocg*

*www.rhrc.org (If Not Now, When)*

# 4. The responsibilities of the state and civil society in addressing gender-based violence

Girls and women all over the world are waiting for justice for crimes shrouded by the general culture of impunity in relation to sexual violence.
Credit: IRIN

On 6 July 2004, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan addressed an African Union session in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, and urged African governments to take responsibility for the proliferation of gender-based violence (GBV) in their countries.

"I deplore the fact that sexual and gender-based violence continues to be used as a weapon of war in African conflicts. In parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC] and in the Darfur region of Sudan, gender-based violence has reached almost epidemic proportions. Every effort must be made to halt this odious practice, and bring the perpetrators to justice," he said.

Annan urged African states to do everything they could to "translate into reality" the objectives of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which was adopted on 31 October 2000 and states that "civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those directly affected by armed conflict".

As Annan's statement attests, the issue of GBV during conflict has been getting increased attention in the global community. Rape and other forms of sexual torture in war-torn countries have been graphically described and denounced from many quarters. Humanitarian organizations have been very vocal about the need for increased support and aid for abused women and girls.

Dennis McNamara, a senior UN official, described to IRIN the plight of women and girls in northern Uganda, where rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army are fighting the armed forces: "We are very concerned about the protection of women and girls, in particular, from sexual abuse and violence. There is a lot of that around. There is no rule of law system up there - soldiers are on the move, the girls very poor, social structures have broken down."

McNamara, who is special adviser to the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator on Internal Displacement and Director of the UN Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division, lamented the lack of psychosocial counselling services for survivors of abuse. "We are very concerned about doing more on that - monitoring, reporting, trying to stop it and asking the government to have their courts functioning", he told IRIN.

Save the Children UK, in a recent report on the crisis in the Darfur region of western Sudan, said that many rape victims could not distinguish whether their attackers came from the militia or from the regular army. "Many interviewees reported being gang-raped, some of them while pregnant. Rapes initially took place as part of attacks on villages, though many continue in and around camps," it said.

Amnesty International, in a 19 July report titled ***'Rape as a weapon of war: sexual violence and its consequences'***, said of the Darfur crisis: "Abuses against women are an integral part of the conflict and are too often neglected. They must urgently be taken into account in the Sudanese government and international community's response to the crisis."

The question repeatedly posed by humanitarian organizations is 'whose responsibility is it to stop abuses against women and girls during and after conflict?'

## A short history of GBV in conflict

During wars and most forms of civil conflict, women and children have historically been targeted for a particular kind of treatment. Armed conflict has included genocide, rape and sexual violence. These atrocities have often been used to destabilise and dehumanise "the enemy", whose face is often female.

While some of the most brutal violence against women was documented in the early part of the 20th century (the rape of Nanking, the Nazi genocide, the Japanese enslavement and rape of "comfort women" during World War II), the majority of cases that have come to public attention and been condemned have been in the past decade. Rhonda Copelon, a professor of law and an expert on women's rights issues, has said that until a decade ago, it was openly questioned whether rape was a war crime.

The world community was shocked by the facts of the systematic and widespread rape, torture and murder of women and girls in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda in the 1990s. In its 2004 publication 'It's in our hands (Stop Violence against women)', Amnesty International documented a wide range of GBV incidents. It described how during the Indonesian occupation of East Timor from 1975-1999, women were routinely raped or forced into sexual slavery if suspected of sympathising with the pro-independence opposition or being related to its members. Haitian women married to political organisers were raped and brutalised after an attempted 1991 coup. During the conflict between the state of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers - from the 1980s to the recent past - women in custody

have been blindfolded, beaten and raped by army, policy and navy officials. While men and boys were also victims of war, these particular forms of violence against unarmed non-combatants were used primarily on the female populations.

The World Health Organization (WHO) noted in 2002 that "in many countries that have suffered violent conflict, the rates of interpersonal violence remain high even after cessation of hostilities - among other reasons because of the way violence has become more socially acceptable and the availability of weapons." A US army study 'Hidden Casualties' published in 2003 in Southern Exposure magazine reported "severe aggression" against spouses to be three times higher in army families than in civilian ones. In countries such as Liberia and the DRC, which are officially in a "post-conflict" state, violence against the female population has not ceased. In the DRC, the DOCS (Doctors on Call for Service) hospital reported that in the eastern town of Goma, child rape had increased by 20.6 percent in the first five months of 2004.

## The issue of impunity

Impunity - the absence of punishment - is the failure to bring to justice perpetrators of human rights violations. UN Security council Resolution 1325 emphasises the responsibility of all states to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for "genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls".

Impunity builds a climate of normalcy and acceptability to crimes of beating, rape and other forms of violence. According to Amnesty International, impunity continues even when there are laws prohibiting violence against women because "social institutions, cultural norms and political structures in every country sustain and maintain it, making the law a dead letter". Women know this and so do not seek justice, and the cycle of violence continues. A WHO report published in 2003 into attitudes among Ugandan men and women said that beating a female partner was viewed as justifiable in certain circumstances by 70 percent of men and 90 percent of female respondents.

The UN's Dennis McNamara summed up to IRIN the predicament of rape victims in Sudan's Darfur crisis. "A raped woman in Sudan must go to the police before she can go to hospital. And most of them don't want to go to the police," he said.

WHO has pointed out that communities which condemn violence, take action to end it and provide support for survivors, have lower levels of violence than communities that do not take action. During conflict periods, the challenge for the community is greater with fewer resources, but the will for justice is often greater still.

## The need for accountability

The classification of rape in war has changed very slowly, according to gender experts. They say that in the 1907 Hague Convention, rape was seen as a violation of family honour - a moral offence, rather than a crime of violence.

In 1948, the international community signed on to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaimed that everyone should enjoy human rights without discrimination. However, gender experts say that due to the prevailing global "gender blindness", women's human rights were overlooked in the following years of "man-made" legislation. Many international agreements have included gender equality, most notably the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but it was not until the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna that women's rights were officially declared as human rights. This was achieved after intense lobbying from the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights. In December 1993, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Violence against Women was adopted.

Varbah Gayflor; Interior Minister for Gender, Liberia. Credit: IRIN

Varbah Gayflor; Interior Minister for Gender, Liberia
Credit: IRIN

The most significant of the international lobbying events was the far-reaching Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, agreed upon at the Fourth World UN Conference on Women in 1995. Subsequent world conferences have developed more precise and practical steps that civil society and governments can take to prevent violence against women and girls, as well as how to provide redress to victims.

Pressure has been kept up on the world community to honour these UN agreements through follow-up lobbying from women's groups across national and regional boundaries. The UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia began to prosecute rape and sexual violence as war crimes against humanity, while the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in 1998 prosecuted rape as genocide.

Dr Kelly D.Askin, director of the International Criminal Justice Institute, has said that provisions are needed in international humanitarian law that take women's experiences of sexual violence as a starting point rather than just a by-product of war. The UN's Resolution 1325, which is due to be reviewed by the Security Council in October, emerged from the leadership of supportive governments, the advocacy of non-governmental organizations and technical assistance from the UN Development Fund for Women

(UNIFEM) and other gender advocates in the UN system. The resolution was seen as setting a new threshold of action for the Security Council, the UN system and for all governments.

### Whose responsibility to protect?

A Somali male journalist said of violence against women: "Here in Africa we're still in denial about violence against women, absolutely. Honestly, anyone in their right mind wouldn't deny it. It isn't even an aberration - it happens daily".

African men do not have a monopoly on violence against women. It happens in every country. WHO says that "worldwide, it has been estimated that violence against women is as serious a cause of death as cancer and a greater cause of ill health than traffic accidents and malaria combined".

Traditional family systems where men were seen as the defenders of wife and children have been eroded in many instances due to poverty, men leaving home to seek work, illness (due to HIV/AIDS and other fatal ailments) and war. Men who do survive regional wars and return home are often without employment and angry. Instead of rebuilding their family lives, many take out their frustrations on their families, especially their wives.

With the breakdown of traditional family roles, a vacuum is left. Wars make these situations even worse. Women and girls' vulnerability during conflict becomes even more severe. Many are forced to flee their homes and become refugees or internally displaced persons - IDPs. This is where international laws are most needed.

While it is in women's interest to lobby the world "authorities" to make effective laws that protect women's rights, the onus of protection is still on men's shoulders, according to a 2002 UNIFEM report. Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, authors of 'Women War and Peace', summarised the situation since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001: "Across the world 30,000 children under the age of five died of preventable diseases on September 11, September 12 and every day since; the plague of HIV/AIDS has marched on; and decision-making on matters of peace and security remains male dominated," they said.

Kofi Annan's appeal to African nations in July to translate into reality Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security can be seen as a call to all member nations to act to ensure, as Annan hopes, that impunity becomes "a relic of the past".

## 5. UN peacekeeping - working towards a no-tolerance environment

Peacekeepers in Liberia and DRC have been accused of sexual violence against woman and girls. Credit: IRIN

Allegations of sexual violations perpetrated by some UN peacekeepers in the last two years have been widely reported by media and human rights groups. As the UN undertakes an increasing number of peacekeeping missions, the organisation faces the challenge of how to maintain ethical standards and codes of behaviour among its disparate troops, a challenge that the head of the UN mission in Burundi, Carolyn McAskie, told IRIN she is actively working to address in the Central African country.

Appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Burundi in June this year, McAskie has a UN force composed of troops from five member countries. Troops from three of these have been named in alleged rape and sexual abuse scandals in neighbouring DRC.

McAskie told IRIN that the UN was aware of the allegations and working to create an environment in which abuse would not be tolerated, a message that she had relayed in her first meeting with Burundi President Domitien Ndayizeye. She also had the unequivocal support of the mission's Force Commander, Lieutenant-General Derrick Mgwebi of South Africa, she added.

When reports of sexual abuses by some UN personnel in West Africa emerged in 2002, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated a clear policy of zero-tolerance for sexual misconduct by staff. However, subsequent allegations of exploitation and abuses by peacekeepers emerged in Kosovo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In the DRC, some UN soldiers were accused of sexually abusing minors under the age of 18, trading food for sex, child rape and organising a child prostitution ring in Bunia, north eastern DRC. [See Focus on sexual misconduct by UN personnel]

However, the DRC is by no means the first documented case of sexual violation by UN peacekeepers. Human Rights Watch reported on several cases of sexual violence by peacekeepers with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), including the rape of a twelve-year-old girl in Bo by a soldier of the Guinean contingent, as well as the gang rape of a woman by two Ukrainian soldiers near Kenema.

### Taking decisive action

Anna Stotton, DPKO's New York-based focal point on sexual exploitation and abuse, told IRIN that the

Carolyn McAskie, Undersecretary General for Burundi. Credit: UN-OCHA

Sierra Leone scandal had served as the wake-up call for the UN. As such, there was a realisation that issues of discipline in peacekeeping operations had to be centralised within the organisation.

In response, DPKO has developed disciplinary directives for all personnel serving in peace operations; it has participated in an Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on sexual exploitation and abuse; developed guidelines and trained peacekeepers in the DRC and Sierra Leone, said Stotton.

In order to overcome reported shortcomings in monitoring mechanisms, the UN has also set up system-wide focal points responsible for dealing with charges of gender-based violence. In peacekeeping missions, these Personnel Conduct Officers are appointed as focal points on sexual exploitation, charged with monitoring incidents and identifying patterns at the outset.

At present, this is perceived to be the most effective means of monitoring potential abuses, said Stotton. One such officer in MONUC uncovered the exploitation scandal in Bunia, after investigating local media reports from the region.

All 17 peacekeeping missions have these officers, supported by standardised policy guidelines and training. An information sheet has been developed for local populations, informing them on the codes of conduct that bind peacekeeping troops, said Stotton.

Some institutional obstacles remain. The UN Secretary-General issued a bulletin in 2003 setting out directives on conduct and behaviour for all UN personnel deployed to conflict areas. However, this does not formally bind military troops. Unlike UN civilian personnel who are accountable to the Secretary-General, peacekeeping troops remain answerable to their own national military authorities.

This applies equally to issues of sexual misconduct. "There is nothing that we can do to discipline military troops, except in the case of rape, where a mission can launch a board of inquiry which could lead to a recommendation for repatriation," said Stotton.

McAskie told IRIN that the UN was not in the business of running military tribunals or court martials. "But we definitely need to develop ways to make our troops more accountable to the system they are working under." A list of convicted perpetrators was being prepared by the UN, so that they could never work on another peacekeeping mission, but that did not ensure that they would be punished in their home countries, she said.

McAskie aims to prevent incidents of abuse through improved training. She told IRIN that UN mission staff in Burundi had been drafting a code of behaviour and preparing training courses to sensitise troops to gender equality and human rights issues.

Stotton agreed that much could be done through training and creating greater awareness of sexual exploitation issues. "Some troops do not even realise that prostitution, or having sex with minors under the age of 18, is illegal." Often the age of consent might be different in the countries from which they originate, and national laws relating to prostitution may be lenient or not enforced.

## Key to breaking the cycle

"We're trying to push for one UN mission, one standard for everyone. We can't have military troops under one set of guidelines and civilians under another," said Stotton. A pilot model for sexual exploitation and abuse had been developed and was available for any military or civilian police serving in a peacekeeping mission. Subsequent training programmes would be prepared for middle and senior management, to ensure that leaders sent out clear signals, creating an environment of zero-tolerance for abuse, she added.

"We're not here to fight the 'bad apples' in a mission. We're conveying that there is a policy stance on this issue and that this may be different to a troop's national standard. And if something happens, it's not because we haven't trained them," Stotton said.

Meanwhile in Burundi, the sheer increase in numbers of soldiers on the ground has created an added burden, that of prostitution. "With more soldiers in the area, 'sex workers' are gathering at the borders. They know the men are being paid and they desperately need income. This is not the kind of income producing activity that we have envisioned for local women," McAskie told IRIN. With over 5,000 young male soldiers in the peace-keeping mission there, the challenge to the UN to maintain acceptable codes of behaviour among the soldiers was formidable, she said.

# 6. Impunity and gender-based violence: The second wound of rape

The extreme youth of some victims of sexual violence did not protect them from attack. Credit: IRIN

The terrible trauma of rape is not the only crime committed against victims of sexual assault. In most cases, a second wound is inflicted by the fact that perpetrators rarely face any form of justice. In times of war, impunity for rapists is only more flagrant.

Lyn Lusi, founder of a clinic in the Democratic Republic of Congo for victims of sexual violence, told IRIN: "Unfortunately I don't think the problem is reduced despite all the publicity it's getting".

" …all that publicity is saying, there's impunity, there's impunity. There's nothing to frighten people … now they know they can do it without paying the consequences," said Lusi, whose clinic is in the town of Goma.

Both international and internal conflicts are normally characterized by a breakdown of state structures and authority. Judicial systems are often among the first casualties. In many cases, countries where widespread gender-based violence occurs today did not have a functioning or incorruptible judiciary before conflict.

In addition, the culture may be a male-dominated one in which traditional values encourage men to have proprietary attitudes towards women. The prosecution of sexual criminals is often only a declaration of intentions by the authorities that results in inaction, thus providing a non-risk environment for perpetrators.

Misconceptions concerning the rationale of inflicting sexual violence in conflict have hindered the prosecution of culprits. According to Dorothy Thomas and Regan Ralph, from the Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project, "rape in conflict must be understood as an abuse that targets women for political and strategic reasons" (Rape in War: Challenging the Tradition of Impunity). Sexual violence is increasingly a strategic tool of war, especially in conflicts driven by identity politics.

Recent examples of organized campaigns of mass rape in the former Yugoslavia attest to this logic that sexual assault is committed "in order to punish a group of civilians for perceived sympathies with armed insurgents, and to demonstrate the soldiers' domination over civilians". As such, rape is the ultimate weapon of ethnic cleansing, dehumanizing the victim, intending to terrorize populations into flight, and sometimes forcibly impregnating women to force their ethnicity onto their victims in societies where 'male descent' defines identity. This was not only prevalent in the Balkans war, but overwhelmingly used by the Hutu against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994.

But when sexual violence is a planned part of the military campaign, it is highly unlikely that authorities will prosecute their own troops for acts which they enjoined soldiers to commit in the first place.

In DRC where hundreds of thousands of women and girls have been raped, people told IRIN they knew of only one man sentenced for sexual violence.
Credit: IRIN
The fact that rape as been "narrowly portrayed as sexual or personal in nature, [is] a portrayal that depoliticises sexual abuse in conflict and results in its being ignored as a war crime", according to Thomas and Ralph. The recognition of this political aspect of rape in war is essential to ending the impunity of most perpetrators. It is only in 1998 that the International Criminal Court included in its statutes the categorization of "rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity […] when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population" as both a crime against humanity and a war crime. (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, article 7).

But, in many countries, the legal framework addressing sexual violence is weak and the instruments in place to implement the laws are flawed. According to Amnesty International (AI), which recently launched its "Stop violence against women" campaign, "in many countries, the laws are inadequate, the police force is uninterested and the criminal justice system is remote, expensive and biased against women". It is therefore essential to change the perception of violence against women from a private matter to one of public concern, AI said as it called on countries to take action.

However, most mechanisms for holding war criminals accountable apply to crimes committed in international conflicts only. By contrast, similar instruments for abuses committed in internal conflicts are rarely supported by means for enforcement. Accountability may be particularly difficult to establish when abusers cross national borders.

Certain individuals are also statutorily immune to legal action. The fact that UN peacekeepers accused of sexually abusing local women cannot be prosecuted by local authorities has often been criticized. (GREAT LAKES: Focus on sexual misconduct by UN personnel).

Regardless of legal norms and their applicability, the specific nature of sexual assaults paradoxically

facilitates assailants' impunity. Many cultures and religions shy away from discussing sex and, especially, sexual violence.

In DRC where hundreds of thousands of women and girls have been raped, people told IRIN they knew of only one man sentenced for sexual violence. Credit: IRIN

Rape is sometimes seen as a stigma, degrading not only the victim, but also his or her entire family or community. In such cases, the focus is usually on concealing the assault, rather than bringing the culprits to justice. This is especially true in societies in which men's domination of women is culturally imbedded. According to Thomas and Ralph, "in a bizarre twist, [the sufferer] changes from a victim into a guilty party, responsible for bringing dishonor upon her family or community". In order to report a crime, a victim has to perceive herself as such in the first place.

Mischaracterising rape as a crime against honour contributes to the perpetrator's impunity, as fear of subsequent rejection by society may lead the victim to simply not report the crime. Such impunity may encourage further sexual violence against women.

Perpetrators' impunity is also enhanced by the lack of access to education, health issues and proper information about basic rights. For many women, the prospect of reporting sexual violations to police or judicial authorities is intimidating and, moreover, there is also the fear of retribution. In many countries rural populations have little cause for confidence when dealing with any representatives of the state or rebel power structures. Reporting a crime may also entail expenses and travel, whereas their priorities are survival and seeking medical assistance.

Women learn fast that they are rarely offered justice and only open themselves up to possible harassment or abuse if they persist in seeking to identify and prosecute perpetrators. One young woman who spoke to IRIN in Goma told how she returned home one day to find a soldier raping her 10-month-old daughter. The soldier was initially reprimanded, but then released without punishment. A local court judge confirmed, on condition of anonymity, that virtually all cases of sexual violation were dropped when the accused bribed judges and court officials.

Not only do the legal mechanisms need to be in place for impunity to end, but attitudinal and behavioural changes are needed in cultures where widespread sexual violence is tolerated and the political will to end the epidemic is absent.


Sophie Read-Hamilton, working to end the culture of impunity in DRC. Credit: IRIN

## 7. War and women's health

A line of women wait their turn at the UNICEF clinic in Goma, DRC. Credit: IRIN

Armed conflicts led to the deaths of some 2.8 million people in 2000, according to the British Medical Journal on Conflict World Wide. While the majority of people who died as a result of war were men aged between 15 and 44, a quarter were women aged 15 to 29. The International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian organization that is very active in the area of gender-based violence (GBV), estimated that women and children comprised 40 percent of the 350,000 deaths in the five eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) between August 1998 and April 2001.

These figures only begin to tell the story of the effect of armed conflict on the female population of war-ravished countries. While death and disability are the direct result of war, the breakdown of public health systems has a long-term impact on the population as a whole. Factoring in the impact of GBV on the war-affected female population means adding a new level of war-related health issues.

In a publication on GBV in the DRC titled ***I have no joy, no peace of mind***, Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) describes the ordeal of a 34-year-old mother raped in a field and forced to watch her 15-year-old daughter being ravished as well. " As she tried to escape, they beat her up and broke her leg with a gunshot," the woman said. "Three men raped her. I was so shocked. I so wished I could have prevented this from happening. She was still a virgin."

Another rape victim in the eastern DRC town of Goma told IRIN how she and her eight-year-old daughter were raped by "military men" in front of her husband. The husband later rejected the woman, leaving her to cope by herself and deal alone with her trauma. Sexual violence against women and girls in conflict situations leads not only to terrible physical suffering, but mental health problems too.

"Families and communities can be affected over generations," Juliane Kippenberg, co-author of a 2002 Human Rights Watch report 'The War within the War' on sexual violence against women and girls in eastern DRC, told IRIN. "A lot of women [in eastern DRC] were raped in front of their children. They will be affected," she said.

## The effects of war on women's health and well-being

**Physical effects:** Many girls and women are gang-raped during or after war. Some are very young, even infants, others are very old. As a result they suffer multiple physical injuries. Sometimes the effects are felt immediately, others take years to manifest. Among the injuries are abrasions and tears:

Fistula - a tear in the walls separating hollow internal organs such as the vagina and the rectum. This causes very painful eliminations and incontinence, along with strong odours. Many of these women suffer family and community rejection.

Broken bones - as a result of torture and gang rapes. Many of these are not treated properly because of a lack of access to public health. This results in lifelong disability.

Amputations - used as a brutal reminder to victims of the enemy's 'intent' (used often during the civil war in Sierra Leone).

Back pain and migraines - sometimes immediate, but often long-term, chronic effects of brutal attacks.

MSF described the physical injury of women suffering from GBV as often "pain all over the body and in particular areas where they have been beaten with fists, weapons or sticks. Many complain of joint pains to the hip and back when their legs have been extensively and violently spread out."

Stanilas Bya Munga of GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschafft fur technische Zusammenarbeit), described to IRIN the torture of women by combatants in the town of Bukavu, eastern DRC: "Sometimes, after raping a woman, they would spread her legs until they snapped like chickens".

**Malnutrition:** Often, civil conflict and human rights abuses have either paved the way for famines such as those in Biafra in the 1960s and the Horn of Africa in the mid-1980s, or prevented food from reaching starving communities as happened in Angola. Authors Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf noted in a 2002 United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) publication titled War Women and Peace "women and children die in extremely high rates in such circumstances". Even in Bosnia in the early 1990s, the death rate was four times as high as during the pre-war period in one Muslim enclave due to severe malnutrition. And because women are usually the last to eat, when resources are scarce, they become severely anaemic. They lack iron, which can be fatal for pregnant women. A study among Somali refugees showed that up to 70 percent of the women of reproductive age were anaemic. And in Afghanistan, 9.8 percent of people suffering from scurvy (lack of vitamin C) were women of child-bearing age.

**Reproductive health:** During conflicts, women's reproductive health is severely threatened. Breakdowns in public health services and the scarcity of money mean little or no access to birth control, life-saving pregnancy-related care, and supplies for menstruating women. It is only recently that humanitarian agencies have included sanitary supplies in relief packages. Without them girls stay home from school and women miss work and training. This is especially important in post-conflict, refugee camp settings.


Women suffering from fistula wash their clothes together. Credit: IRIN

In poor countries, the mortality rate during pregnancy and delivery is 40 times higher than in the industrialised nations, according to a 1995 UN study. During and after armed conflict, countries' statistics become even more dramatic. In the DRC approximately 42,000 women died in childbirth in 2001. One woman in 50 dies giving birth in Angola. In Afghanistan policies restricting women's movement were catastrophic for their health: maternal deaths were among the highest in the world.

Conflict also has indirect consequences on women's health. In Eritrea, the recent border war with Ethiopia caused a redeployment of scarce resources to the frontlines. This meant that women did not get the care they needed and led to many 'spontaneous' abortions (miscarriages) brought on by physical and mental stress. After miscarriages women need immediate medical assistance to save their lives and prevent infertility.

Unwanted and unplanned pregnancies can also be a result of war and GBV. Women displaced from their families are especially vulnerable. Those using family planning to avoid pregnancy need it even more when displaced. However, in refugee camps these services are often not available. A strategy of forced pregnancy has been used in recent and ongoing conflicts such as those in Bosnia/Herzegovina, East Timor, Kosovo, Rwanda and Sudan. Tens of thousand of women

and girls have suffered the trauma of being raped repeatedly and impregnated by their violators. Bosnian women for instance faced terrible choices, according to Rhen and Johnson Sirleaf. Some chose abortion if they were able to get to services early enough. Others had the babies, but abandoned them without ever seeing them. The few who kept their babies faced rejection by their families and social isolation.

Young girls who have lost family guidance due to war and displacement are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation. WHO in Liberia estimated that up to 80 percent of displaced girls had had induced abortions by the age of 15. Such early pregnancy is very risky for girls because their bodies have not developed enough to deliver safely nor are they mature enough to be parents. Girls aged 10 to 14 are five times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth than women aged 20 to 24.

**Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):** STIs are reaching epidemic proportions globally. Although many of these diseases are easily diagnosed and treated with antibiotics, this aspect is often neglected in emergency situations. A study of Rwandan women attending antenatal clinics in refugee camps in Tanzania found that more than 50 percent were infected with some form of STI. Military populations are two to five times more likely to be infected than civilians, so during conflict - and with GBV - the rates in the female population rise. HIV is one of the most serious STIs resulting from rape.

**Mental health:** The mental effects of war and GBV can be enormous. Anxiety, post- traumatic stress disorders, depression and suicide are the most common. One Muslim survivor from the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica made this statement to UNIFEM : "Many people have acquired PhDs studying us, but no one helps us". The woman had lost her husband and sons, watched children die of hunger and was repeatedly raped. Now she had nothing.

**The burden of caring for others:** Despite all the horrors women experience during and after wars, they are also the ones who bear the burden of caring for the ill. They try to protect and care for children and the elderly and provide support for parents and husbands. Rarely is there anyone to care for them. Often husbands who do survive and stay with their families become so depressed that they drink too much and abuse their families. Many women spend their time and energy trying to keep the peace in their households and lining up for hours to get food, or offer sex to strangers for money in order to buy medicine.

Rhen and Johnson Sirleaf state emphatically at the end of their study that "it is tragic that basic health care for women affected by war must compete with food, shelter and landmine clearing".

8. Special reports and articles (from IRIN reporters)

## ANGOLA: After the war ends, violence against women continues

Years of conflict have left women and children destitute and extremely vulnerable to sexual attack. Credit: IRIN

Two years after the end of a brutal 27-year civil war, violence against women in Angola is on the rise. The conflict, in which over a million people were killed, had an adverse effect on the entire nation and has contributed to an increase in gender violence across all strata of society.

"The figures we have collected between 2001 and 2003 show that there's been an increase in violence against women," Solange Machado, a lawyer who specializes in helping female victims of violence at a women's centre in Luanda, told IRIN. The centre is run by the NGO Organizacao de Mulheres Angolana (Organisation of Angolan Women).

Machado said that in addition to the psychological effect of war, its material impact has played a significant role in the increase in gender violence. Today most of Angola's 13 million people live in dire poverty, despite the country's rich oil and diamond reserves.

### Violence fed by material, psychological effects of war

"Many people don't have homes - you can have a whole family living in one room - that creates problems. Many people are unemployed and when they have jobs they tend to be badly paid. Everyone knows that when people don't have bread to eat they often turn to violence," Machado said.

"Every Angolan lost at least one family member during the conflict. Many people lived in parts of the country where they were confronted with the reality of war on a daily basis - gunshots, bombs and landmines," Eduarda Borja, a member of the Angolan NGO Rede Mulheres (Women's Network) told IRIN. Angola's first elections in 1992 marked a turning point in the conflict. The results were disputed by the rebel movement UNITA and the war, which had been predominantly rural, spread to more populated urban centres in the provinces, Borja said.

"In addition to the physical destruction of buildings, people were unable to move around freely because of the fighting," she said. "The population, especially the young, became increasingly insensitive, yet no psychological work was ever done to help them get over the trauma of seeing friends and family killed with such ease."

"As a result of the war, many people resorted to violence to deal with their problems," a fact that was not limited simply to low-income households, Borja maintained. "Today, practically every Angolan family is home to some form of violence. In richer households, this violence can be more sophisticated, better hidden, but it still exists. In poorer families it is more brutal." she said.

### Male insecurity

Angolan gender specialist Henda Ducados agreed that economic problems stemming from the conflict were at the root of the issue. "Because of the war, a lot of men are unemployed and unable to contribute to the household on a regular basis. It seems many feel undermined by the fact that women are bringing home the earnings. Their frustrations have often led to greater drug and alcohol consumption and violence against women," she said. "Men feel a sense of frustration from their economic condition, also the fact that many have come back from the war and haven't been reintegrated into society." With around 4 million people displaced during the conflict, community and family structures simply broke down, Ducados said. "In the past, when a couple got together, they needed the consent of both sides of the family and the community would usually follow the life of the couple and try to resolve any problems they had. However in peri-urban areas, people no longer care what the community is going to say about extra-marital affairs or the forming of secondary households," she said.

Government soldiers and guns at Calala demobilisation camp. Credit: IRIN

"Even if they're in an abusive or violent relationship, women's perception is that they would be worse off without a man around because they appear more vulnerable and insecure in the eyes of the community. Those who do leave their partners usually have support from their relatives," she added.

### Laws against criminal violence needed

Meanwhile, much has still to be done to curb the growing phenomenon of gender-based violence. Machado maintains that Angola must work toward introducing legislation on violent crime. "At the moment there simply isn't enough in place in legal terms to force people to think twice before they turn to violence," she said. The government is sensitive to the problem, but there's still a long way to go before this kind of law is introduced - we first need to complete our studies and come up with a concrete proposal."

"Legal measures to punish those committing these acts of violence won't help to resolve the core of the problem," Borja argued. "Material conditions need to be improved and we need to see more psychological work and more programmes to teach people basic tolerance."

8. Special reports and articles (from IRIN reporters)

## DRC: Fighters commit atrocities against women and also men

There is no shortage of armed groups in South Kivu region in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Some are home grown, such as the local militias called the Mayi Mayi. Others are foreign born, like the former Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), who fled to the DRC after the regime that presided over the 1994 genocide in Rwanda was toppled.

Some have been around for years, like the Interahamwe, militiamen from Rwanda's main ethnic group, the Hutu, who fled along with the FAR after they committed the bulk of the genocide against the minority Tutsi. Others are new, such as dissidents who broke away from the national army in late May, took over South Kivu's main town, Bukavu, for about a week in early June, and then withdrew.

Rape victims in Bukavu now learning new skills as seamstresses at the Action pour l'encadrement des Soeurs Dinah (AESDI), a protestant church centre set up to care for such women. Instructor in red dress, not a rape victim, standing
Credit: IRIN

All these groups, observers say, have committed similar acts of violence and rape.

"Most of these rapes were by the Interahamwe"

The German technical cooperation agency, GTZ, has been documenting sexual violence by combatants against civilians in South Kivu since 2002. Some of the acts were gruesome: women shot in their private parts; gun barrels rammed into victims' vaginas; families forced to look on as mothers and daughters were raped.

"Most of these rapes were by the Interahamwe, but some were by members of the national army," GTZ's Stanilas Bya Mungu said.

The army dissidents also carried out atrocities during their occupation of Bukavu, according to Bya Mungu. They would choose a neighbourhood and go from house to house, raping from one-year-old babies to women as old as 80, he said. The dissidents broke into medical distribution centers, stole Viagra that had been stored there, and distributed it to their comrades, he said. By 20 July, GTZ had documented 130 women raped in Bukavu during the occupation.

Combatants were brutal with women who resisted rape. "In some cases they dripped melting rubber into their vaginas and onto their breasts," Bya Mungu said. "Sometimes, after raping a woman they would spread her legs until they snapped like a chicken's."

In one report, combatants killed a man and raped his wife and daughter on the same spot. "The woman recounted how her husband's warm blood was seeping onto her as his Interahamwe killers raped her," Bya Mungu said.

In acts seemingly designed to belittle the men further, the Interahamwe reportedly beat men's penises with rifle butts while telling them they would never use their organs again.

Why the Interahamwe should turn against their Congolese "hosts" was unclear. Bya Mungu offered one explanation: the Interahamwe fought for the DRC's previous government against the Tutsis, but Kinshasa failed to help them regain power in Kigali, he said.

Another opinion offered by an observer was that the Interahamwe had worked previously with the Mayi-Mayi but were angered when the Mayi-Mayi agreed to join the new government that came to power in mid-2003. The Interahamwe reacted by fighting them and continuing their refusal to abide by a 1999 ceasefire agreement that called for their disarmament and repatriation.

## Living with the consequences of the atrocities

In the meantime, many women are forced to live with the consequences of the atrocities they were subjected to. Some had their wombs destroyed. Others suffer from fistula, a medical condition whereby a tear is created between the anal cavity and the birth canal. One woman at a centre for rape victims in Bukavu had lost control of her bladder since her ordeal. The centre, called Action pour l'Encadrement des Soeurs Dihah, had 42 rape victims in July, including 11 who were abused repeatedly, according to its coordinator, London Pauline. Some of the girls had been rejected by their families. The youngest, 13 years old, was pregnant.

The centre also takes care of infants born out of rape. It had 53 children in July.

Children of raped women at a crèche called the Action pour l'encadrement des Soeurs Dinah (AESDI) in Bukavu, South Kivu Province
Credit: IRIN

Initially Pauline had no support to care for her charges. Later, a Swedish missionary from the Pentecostal Church visited the centre and donated money, which she used to start a micro credit scheme for the girls and provide seeds and farming implements for those who came from rural areas. Some of the girls at the centre have returned to school. Others are making a living from petty trade.

The centre also provides legal aid to victims who can identify their attackers. "Some were raped by their neighbours," Pauline said.

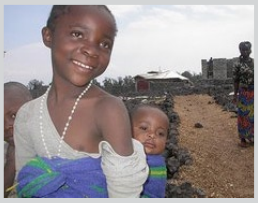
Some of the girls are still traumatised by the events in Bukavu but the NGO World Vision said it would provide them with psychosocial care.

[See also DRC: Special report on war and peace in the Kivus]

8. Special reports and articles (from IRIN reporters)

# BURUNDI: Fear condemns many to silence

Some organisations in Burundi offer abused women help in taking legal action against their violators, but caregivers say fear of retaliation, stigmatisation and rejection cause many survivors of gender-based violence to remain silent.



Throughout the world young girls and women as victims of sexual attacks fear coming forward to complain or accuse their attackers. This only encourages the culture of impunity
Credit: IRIN

On average only about half of all women who are raped are willing to lay charges against the perpetrators, says Dominique Proteau, a field officer at a centre for rape victims run by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in the Burundi capital, Bujumbura. Only 10 to 15 percent actually go on to initiate legal proceedings, Proteau told IRIN.

Women and girls have been doubly affected by a civil war that has lasted all of 11 years in Burundi. Like their male counterparts, many have been killed, injured or displaced but, in addition to that, they are also subjected to various forms of abuse, including incest, sexual harassment, sexual slavery and rape.

Sometimes the perpetrators are combatants, like the rebels who gang-raped 19-year-old Nancy [not her real name] as she walked home from school one evening. She used to be a cheerful, confident girl who did well in school and dreamt of a bright future, she said. Since the attack, however, she has lost interest in her studies, and her dreams have been replaced by the nightmares brought on by her ordeal.

In many cases, however, the perpetrators are not combatants, but civilians, including family members, according to Dieudonné Nsanzamahoro, a psychologist at the Nturengaho Centre in Bujumbura, which takes care of rape victims [Nturengaho is Kirundi for "Stop it"].

"An adolescent girl obliged to have sex with her teacher or fail her exams, a woman forced to share her bed with her father-in-law, or a woman forced to sit in the living room in her panties after sex, all are victims of sexual violence," he said.

No one knows for sure how many women are subjected to rape. In 2003, 983 rape victims were registered countrywide, Iteka, a Burundian human rights group, reported this year. According to Proteau, MSF receives an average of 125 rape victims each month at its centre. However, these are just the ones who come forward. Many don't.

One of the reasons the victims keep silent, Nsanzamahoro says, is that, often, they are not taken seriously, especially since many offenders try to defend their actions by claiming that their victims had been provocative or had shown willingness.

Many of the women are reluctant to talk about their experiences because families and communities often reject those who go public. Nsanzamahoro cited the case of a girl from the commune of Kabezi in Bujumbura Rural Province who had been gang raped by rebels. She was taunted by her peers, who called her "assailants' wife". "In many cases, men simply abandon their wives to marry others," Proteau said.

Sometimes survivors are afraid they might be killed or maimed by their violators if they identify them. Another deterrent is the length of time it takes to complete legal proceedings which, in any event, often end with the release of the offenders or the imposition of light sentences.

The victims of abuses often suffer extensive physical and psychological injury. Sometimes the level of violence is so high - as when sharp objects are used by the rapists - that death or barrenness can result, Proteau said. Other risks include contracting sexually transmitted diseases or HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancies.

A study on the obstacles to girls' education in Burundi, conducted in 2003 by the Forum of African Women Educationalists, found that unwanted pregnancies were, after poverty, the second highest cause of girls leaving school prematurely. It found that 28.4 percent of girls who drop out of school do so because of pregnancies, many of which result from sexual violence.

Abuse often results in psychological trauma, Nzansamahoro said. Some survivors of rape might live in permanent fear after the experience, reliving it endlessly in their minds or having recurrent nightmares. For some, the trauma can lead to mental depression and even suicide.

Institutions that seek to help survivors of rape and other gender-based violence in Burundi also include the Association for the Promotion of Human Rights and the Rights of Prisoners (APRODH), the Association of Women Lawyers and Search for Common Ground.

Some of the associations provide legal assistance, while some refer abused women to the MSF Centre.

Every rape victim who reports to the MSF centre has to see a gynaecologist for a complete medical check-up, Proteau said. They can receive contraceptive pills and, if they arrive within 72 hours of their ordeal, protection against HIV infection.

The Nturengaho centre offers rape victims a chance to talk about their ordeals, according to Nsanzamahoro. "We help them to express their fears and to turn their anger against the criminals and not against themselves," he said.

The MSF Centre also provides therapy, in some cases, group therapy. Proteau said several sessions were necessary, and at times women were encouraged to bring their husbands or a relative, so that they could be made aware of the need to assist the victims to regain their dignity. The centre also provides shelter for those unable or afraid to go home.

Caregivers say, however, that for aid to victims of rape and society's attitudes must change: the public must be persuaded to stop blaming the victims and focus more on ensuring that the criminals are properly punished.

Moreover, much of the available assistance is urban based. There is less access to help in the countryside and, even in towns, not everyone has access to information on where to go and what to do when abused.

8. Special reports and articles (from IRIN reporters)

## LIBERIA: Working on rebuilding lives and trust

Victims of sexual violence await medical attention in Liberia. Credit: IRIN

Women generally bore the brunt of the suffering during Liberia's civil wars, which raged on and off for 14 years. As the country begins the long road to recovery, improving their situation is likely to prove an arduous task.

Mama Morris works for Sharpe Home Care Services, a local non-governmental organization providing skills training for women in Liberia - a big job, but one that she believes will empower them, making them better able to defend themselves.

"Traditionally women do not argue with men here in Liberia, that needs to change," Morris told IRIN in Voinjama, the main town in the northern county of Lofa . "We want it to be a 50-50 arrangement in future."

Men are used to being the boss, she said, and during the war years, rape and sexual abuse were often inflicted on women and girls.

"When the fighting was going on in Voinjama, two of my female colleagues stayed on in town - they wanted to carry on doing their job. They were both raped," Morris said. "At that time, medical treatment was non-existent and one of them got an infection. It's been years now and she still has not recovered. She's now sterile.

"As for the other woman, her husband found out. Unfortunately it was a third party that told him. The shock killed him. He had a heart attack and died not shortly after."

"Even the old were raped here in Voinjama," she added.

Voinjama is a small town near Liberia's border with Sierra Leone and Guinea. Over the past decade and a half, it has been battered by recurrent bouts of fighting, the latest of which pitted pro-government forces and rebels from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) movement.

Whenever the fighting came to Voinjama, women would run and hide in the forest. "My aunt hid in the bush for two years and eight months," said Morris. "She ran from Voinjama when she heard the gunfire. When I finally saw her she was covered in maggots, they were all under her skin.

"I prepared a poultice with salt and rubbed it into her skin to draw them out. I tried and tried, but I couldn't make her better," she said sadly. Her aunt died soon afterwards.

The war has ended but it has left deep divisions among the women in Voinjama since not all had remained passive during the conflict. Some took up arms alongside the men. Some, known as "bush wives", were forced to have sex with combatants, who also used them as cooks and porters. "There were female fighters and the 'wives'," Morris explained. "They are here in town, but they are separate from the other women."

Healing the wounds the war has left so that victims and aggressors can live once again side by side is going to be a major challenge, Morris said. After disarmament, people will need "to talk and know we are one".

"First we need to disarm," she said. "We need to talk and know we are one, we need to reconcile."

8. Special reports and articles (from IRIN reporters)

# LIBERIA: War leaves no respect for age in Voinjama, northern Liberia

The Liberian wars have made many women destitute, only increasing their vulnerability to sexual attacks. Credit: IRIN

Vanny Moore[*] has white hair sprouting from under her black headcloth and from her chin. A bird-like woman who cannot weigh more than 50kgs, she sits neatly in a battered wooden chair as she talks about how she put up with repeated rape and abuse.

The elderly woman fled her home in Voinjama, a once bustling town near the border with Guinea, a little more that a year ago to escape escalating battles during the final months of Liberia's civil war. Her nightmare began when fighters of the rebel Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) found her and several other women hiding in the bush.

The rebels forced the women to go back to Voinjama to help them make the town function - and to take care of their needs: cooking, washing clothes and sex.

"At night, the men would come, usually more than one. They would rape me. They said they would help me with food if I helped them. I had no choice. If I was lucky, they gave me 10 Liberian dollars (20 US cents)," she said quietly. But sometimes, she wouldn't even get the miserable tip. The men would just rape her, abuse her and leave her. If she had anything, they would take it - even her clothes - leaving her naked and alone.

Vanny and many others like her were among the most vulnerable victims of Liberia's war. Often widowed or abandoned by their husbands and families, they had no means of protecting themselves.

Vanny does not know how old she is exactly, but she says she was a grown woman when William V.S Tubman was first elected president in 1944. That would make her at least 80 years old. Her age made her easy prey to the young rebel fighters, who made sport of her predicament.

## There was no door to keep the men out

For months, Vanny could do nothing to stop the nighttime visits. She slept in one of Voinjama's many partially destroyed buildings. There was no door on the concrete shell to keep the men out. Neither was there a roof to keep out the rain.

"I have borne five children," said Vanny, only one of them died as a child. "The others, I sent them all to school," she said proudly. "But now there is no-one to take care of me."

Shortly after the first fighting broke out in Liberia at the end of 1989, three of her children fled to Monrovia. Vanny said she was too old to walk the 500 km to the capital, so she told them to leave without her. She doesn't know where they are or if they are still alive. She visited one of her sons in Monrovia once, but cannot recall where he lives exactly - she vaguely remembers that his house was opposite a maternity hospital.

Only one of her adult children, a daughter, stayed with her. For a while, the two of them managed. It was difficult, but they survived like many of the other women in Voinjama, by fleeing into the bush at the sound of gunfire - the first warning that rebels or government soldiers were attacking the town. Often they would get sick. They suffered from parasites living rough in the forest and food was not always easy to find, especially in the rainy season when their clothes seemed to be permanently wet.

"One time, when we were hiding in the bush, my daughter got very sick and died," Vanny said. "I didn't know what to do. It was even harder without my daughter. I had no one to help me to find food," she said. "I lived on green bananas. Not long after that, the soldiers came."

These men did have guns, but they were not soldiers fighting for former president Charles Taylor. They were LURD rebels who found Vanny and the other frightened women in the bush and forced them to return to Voinjama.

Being old and without her daughter, Vanny was particularly vulnerable. There was no one to take care of her, no support. She could find nothing to eat, no one cared about an old lady, not even when a peace agreement brought a formal end to 14 years of civil war in August last year.

For months she lived on the stone floor of the wrecked building, enduring the night-time abuse. This wretched existence finally came to an end when she was taken in by Hanni Gede [*], a young woman who moved back to Voinjama shortly after the town was secured by UN peacekeeping troops.

When the Pakistani battalion arrived in late April there were only about 600 residents in town. But with the arrival of the blue-helmeted peacekeepers, other civilians trickled back in.

### "I thought she was crazy"

"When I first spoke to [Vanny], she was practically naked," said Gede. "I would see her in town. She would be in the street with hardly anything on, dancing for money, for food - anything. I thought she was crazy."

Gede first began inquiring about the old woman after her brother told her that Vanny had been using the wrecked house next to his own to sleep in. During the night, he had heard Vanny's shouts and cries when groups of men - usually LURD fighters - abused the old woman.

"One day I went up to her and [Vanny] said to me: "I'm not crazy you know, but I have no one. I have to do this to eat,"" Gede recalled.

Seeing Vanny's predicament, Gede invited her to stay in her own tumble-down house. The inside is bare, but at least it can be secured from the former combatants and the elements. There Gede shares what little she has with Vanny - even finding her clothes.

"We are all women. I looked at the condition of her and I thought she could have been my mother too, so what could I do?" Gede said.

Asked if she would like to see justice against the men who abused her, and who are still in the small town, she and all the other women who sat in the early morning sun on Gede's verandah laughed at the thought.

"It is enough that it is over," said Vanny, a smile on her face.

** The names of the women quoted in this story have been changed.*

8. Special reports and articles (from IRIN reporters)

## LIBERIA: Rape and sexual violence come hand in hand with war

Most of the women at Mount Barclay IDP Camp have suffered some form of GBV.
Credit: IRIN

Most of the women at Mount Barclay camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Liberia's capital, Monrovia, were raped or otherwise abused during the country's civil wars, the chair of the camp's women's group explains as she gathers the women together for a meeting at the bamboo and thatch church.

"Women! Women-o! Women!" she calls. Then, as everyone settles on the bamboo pews, the chairperson, Hawa Sah, says to IRIN: "There are plenty here who had bad, bad things happen to them in the war." She introduces some of the women, who then tell their stories:

**Coumba M-**

Coumba M- says she is 45, but looks older. She has four children and was pregnant with her fifth, but lost it after she was savagely raped and beaten by Guinean soldiers after fleeing fighting in Liberia. Her face is still marked by the beating. On her forearm she bears the scar of a machete wound.

"We crossed the border in to Guinea on foot in 1993. During the night they came to where we were lying and they said they were going to kill my husband," Coumba says, sitting with her elbows on her knees, her forehead in her hands.

"'Why do you want to kill my husband?' 'Because he is army-man!' they told me." Her children managed to run away, but Coumba stayed and begged for her husband's life: "'Please, if you kill my husband then there will be no one to take care of me,'" she told them.

"The three men, they grabbed me and raped me. I lost the child. I was in pain! I was bleeding badly, there was plenty blood. They tied my husband, so that he couldn't help me," she recalls. "They told me they were going to kill me," Coumba says, as she retells how she was stripped naked and humiliated in front of her husband.

Afterwards they were dumped in a jail without food, water or medical assistance, even though she was bleeding badly after the miscarriage. For a long time, they refused to untie her husband. "They tied his arms so tight that when they finally cut him free, his arms were useless," she says, demonstrating how her husband's arms had hung limply from his shoulders. "The veins and everything were all cut."

They spent 18 days in jail. Every night they were beaten. Once, when she told the soldiers she was

cold, they set her hair on fire. It has not grown back so she keeps her head covered with a cloth. It still hurts sometimes and the pain prevents her from sleeping.

It was only when the UN heard about them and obtained their release that Coumba received medical care. That probably saved her life, although she suffered such internal damage from the rape that she has not been able to bear another child.

Shortly after, when they had recovered somewhat, Coumba and her husband managed to find their children and walked back to their home in Foya, near Liberia's border with Guinea. However, the war continued to rage on and off for the next 10 years. In the final years of the war, rebel soldiers from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) broke into their home. They killed her husband and locked her in the attic. The only reason she is still alive is that she managed to break out of the attic and escape into the bush.

### Alice

Alice's ordeal was at the hands of a different rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), which operated in the east. War had spread to Grand Bassa County, about 100 km east of Monrovia, and she had been trying to reach a safer place when the rebels caught up with her. "I was raped by four MODEL men," she said, as she nursed her three-month-old son, Able. She had no idea which of the men who raped her was Able's father.

"They came in the house, they forced themselves on me," she said in a whisper. " 'You want yourself or you want your life,'" they told her after breaking into the house where she had been hiding. "They beat me. I struggled with them, but I have no father, no brother, no one who could help me."

Her attackers took everything she had, which wasn't much. Afterwards, badly beaten and hurt from the gang-rape, she walked all the way to Monrovia, where she found shelter in the Mount Barclay camp.

"I still get sick from the rape," said Alice, who was worried that she might not be able to have any more children. "I want a job. I want Able to go to school, to become a doctor, but I have nothing. No money, not even enough to go back home."

Life in the camp was tough, and the dampness of the floor on which they slept in her mud-and-thatch house was bad for Able. But at least there were no attacks, and she felt safe.

### Coumba F-

Coumba F- was 60 years old. She could not see clearly. In fact, she had not been able to see well ever since she lost her daughter and one of her grandchildren during their flight from Foya.

Coumba had been helping her daughter to take her three children to school. The youngest was tied to her mother's back. As they walked, LURD rebels attacked the village. They ran into the bush, pursued by some of the rebels, but her daughter tripped and fell. Coumba kept on running with the two other children, aged four and six, leaving her daughter and youngest grandchild behind. They kept going until they reached the IDP camp in Monrovia.

She doesn't remember much about the journey. The children had had to guide her as she could not see where to go.

She is still unable to see clearly.

8. Special reports and articles (from IRIN reporters)

## TAJIKISTAN: Civil war has left one in three women victims of domestic violence

Three Tajik women outside Dushanbe. Credit: IRIN

Fatima and Zuhra Sultanovas are twins. Local legend has it that twins have similar destinies. The sisters' history suggests that the legend may come true. They married - on the same day - twin brothers named Hasan and Hussein. Six years have passed and they have both given birth to two children.

But domestic violence forced Zuhra to return to her father's home, while her sister Fatima was harassed by a neighbour. Later, Zuhra's husband made her have an abortion in her fifth month of pregnancy.

"I was in shock for several weeks," Fatima told IRIN in the northern Tajik city of Khujand. "I could not get away from the idea of committing suicide. I was looking for an easy way of death: I thought of plunging into the river or hanging myself - anything not to live in this world. But my parents stopped me and I am very grateful to them for their moral support."

The twin sisters dared to go against the generally accepted view that only death can wash away disgrace. Fatima and Zuhra made up their minds to fight for their human rights and to get justice. They saw an advert in a newspaper for the Gulrukhsor Crisis Centre, called the hotline and were advised what to do. Then they applied to a court.

An official of the city's prosecuting authorities, Said Babev, had this advice for female victims of violence: "Immediately apply to a court for a medical examination and do not lose your torn clothes. This will all serve as material evidence. Unfortunately, our society and even our investigative bodies gossip about such things... I advise women that, regardless of these prejudices, they should trust in the law and apply to law enforcement bodies."

## Many abused women driven to suicide

Unfortunately, many desperate women still choose the ultimate protest - suicide.

But now there are several crisis centres set up by NGOs where women victims of violence can apply for help, either through hotline numbers or directly.

According to data from the crisis centre run by the Women of Science of Tajikistan Association, in 2002-03, 47 per cent of all registered incidents of violence against women related to sexual violence by their husbands or others, while 51 per cent were cases of psychological cruelty, according to the director of the association, Muhiba Yakubova.

Experts say that two-thirds of women are exposed to domestic violence. In 2002-03, about 90 women committed suicide. In the period 2001-04, 344 women took their own lives and 433 were murdered by their partners.

Along with poverty, some observers link growing violence against women in Tajikistan with the aftermath of the civil war of the 1990s, that led to the death of at least 50,000 people while 1.2 million became refugees or were internally displaced. Women, as ever, suffered disproportionately during and after the conflict.

"Apart from a general deterioration in the position of women, which one should expect during a civil war, women were specifically targeted by the Islamists in the Tajik conflict factions on 'moral grounds'. Islamic behaviour and dress code were brutally enforced, thus degrading and dehumanising women. Moreover, forced marriages and human trafficking - mainly of young girls - became more acceptable during the war," Sergei Andreyev, a research fellow at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, told IRIN.

Another consequence of the civil war, albeit indirect, is the increasing participation of Tajik women in drug trafficking: they are used as "mules" since they are least likely to attract scrutiny by law-enforcement bodies.

But some traditional religious scholars, like Mirzomuhiddin Homidzoda, blame women daring to venture from the home for an upsurge in violence against them "If the woman is a true housewife and is busy with raising her children... she will bring up worthy and well mannered members of society. But alas, these days women are more independent than men. Women are trading in the market, working as labour migrants and businesswomen... In my opinion, all this leads to violence."

## Cruelty against women may be on the increase

Anecdotal evidence suggests that cruelty against women has recently become worse, with mothers-in-law treating their daughters-in-law as servants with no human rights.

"I've been married for three years and feel that I have been sold as a slave," said Malika, barely holding back the tears. Although she works every day from early in the morning until late at night she is constantly accused of being lazy.

"I am sure that neither the prosecutor's office, the police nor my relatives can help me. Family quarrels never get punished by the law. And I cannot apply to a court because my relatives would judge me. My husband and mother-in-law would laugh at me. Sometimes I feel that I have no human rights at all and that the only option is suicide. In such a case, society would blame me for everything, saying that my husband was good, my family was friendly, everything was all right for me," Malika said.

The executive director of the Gulrukhsor Crisis Centre in Khujand says: "The more society becomes civilised, the more the methods of violence will become contrived. Domestic violence exists and one can say that accusations by husbands and mothers-in-law have become more caustic. That is why domestic violence drives women to suicide."

The victims of violence apply very rarely to the legal system. This is for cultural reasons and because they do not believe that their rights can be defended in such a manner. Most think that the only way out is to commit suicide.

## Little help from the legal system

The state judicial system has been ineffective in aiding the victims of violence. Human rights organs do not respond to cases of violence and related suicides. The

Gulrukhsor Crisis Centre has decided to help such women. The case of the Sultanovas sisters prompted them to organize the training of lawyers to defend victims of violence.

Recently, suicide cases have become even more tragic. Victims kill not only themselves but also their children. In September 2003, the inhabitants of Kulob city were shocked by a tragic case in which the victim burned herself together with her two children. Although her elder daughter managed to escape, they could not rescue the mother and her younger daughter. The reason for the suicide appeared to be the financial plight of the family, with the children hungry most of the time. Their father had gone to Russia and not sent anything back for two years.

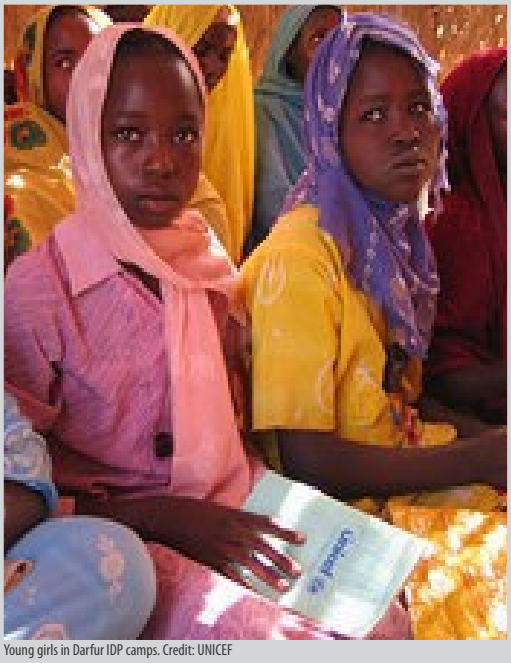
In another case, in April of this year, a 22-year-old woman living in Khujand town plunged into the Syrdar'ya River from the dam at Kayrakkum power station together with her six-month-old daughter.

But the Sultanovas sisters got to court. Zuhra won her case and her husband was imprisoned for two years.

"In the near future we are going to set up temporary refuges at the crisis centre for those women who have undergone violence and have nowhere to go," Muhiba Yakubova of the Women of Science of Tajikistan Association says. Such refuge centres are already active in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and other CIS countries.

8. Special reports and articles (from IRIN reporters)

## SUDAN: Rape as a weapon of war in Darfur



Young girls in Darfur IDP camps. Credit: UNICEF

When we tried to escape they shot more children. They raped women. I saw many cases of Janjawid raping women and girls. They are happy when they rape. They sing when they rape and tell that we are slaves and that they can do what they wish". This testimony from a 37-year-old displaced woman is one of many personal accounts of atrocities committed in Darfur, western Sudan, by Arab militias known as Janjawid that Amnesty International documented in a report titled Rape as a weapon of war in Darfur, launched on 19 July 2004.

**Another woman quoted in the report recalled:**
*I was sleeping when the attack on Disa started. I was taken away by the attackers, they were in uniforms. They took dozens of other girls and made us walk for three hours. During the day we were beaten and they were telling us: "you are black women, we will exterminate you, you have no god". At night we were raped several times. The Arabs* guarded us with arms and we were not given food for three days. (The term Arabs is used here to indicate people predominantly from nomadic groups who speak Arabic as their first language)*

According to Pollyanna Truscott, Amnesty International's Darfur Crisis Coordinator, the aim of the report was to alert the international community to the atrocities being committed against women and girls in Darfur. While the international community seemed to be finally taking action on the Darfur crisis, little was being said about its impact on the female population, Amnesty said at the time. "We have no doubt that they are using rape, among other things, as a way of destroying communities," Truscott said.

Amnesty urged the international community to save the lives of more than a million IDPs in Darfur and tens of thousands of Sudanese refugees in Chad. It said humanitarian aid would not succeed unless civilians, including women and girls, were given adequate and effective protection. In addition to being subjected to abuse, the women also had to deal with another source of psychological pain, according to Truscott: there was a myth going around the camps: if a woman became pregnant from a "rape" it meant she had wanted sex; if she did not want it the pregnancy would not have occurred.


Amnesty representatives present the AI report in Nairobi, July 2004. Credit: IRIN

Amnesty called on the Sudanese government, the armed political groups in Darfur, Chad's government, the African Union, the UN Security Council and UN member states to take action against the atrocities. It also gave suggestions on how mediators, humanitarian agencies and the UN should proceed.

*[To read Amnesty's report, go to http://web.amnesty.org/]*

9. Interviews

## W. Kwendo Opanga, Executive Editor of the East African Standard, Nairobi. July 2004

W. Kwendo Opanga
Credit: IRIN

W. Kwendo Opanga is the editor of one of Kenya's most influential newspapers. In this interview, he discusses some of the principles and considerations which guide his publication's approach to gender-based violence and conflict. Not least among them is the need to protect survivors of abuse and to avoid inflammatory reporting.

**QUESTION: Does your paper have any policy about how to cover war or other conflict situations?**

ANSWER: Definitely. We've not had a country war here, but we've had tribal wars and ethnic conflict. One of the things we do as a national newspaper is to try from the outset not to inflame the situation or make it worse. We would not want to set one community against another …not heighten the tension between groups …We don't want to place gory pictures onto the breakfast tables of our nation. We would highlight the plight of the disadvantaged groups with a view to drawing the attention of the public to them, with the idea that a sensitized people would help ameliorate the situation. It is not something that we have written out as policy, but we have talked about it when going into conflict areas. We sit down as editors with the reporters who go into the field and remind them of the ethics of our profession…remind them of what we stand for…. We are in the process of formulating that policy …

**Q: There has been some criticism recently of the media's role in reporting incidents of gender-based violence especially in times of war and with children. What position does your paper take in reporting on such incidents?**

A: In Goma, they are in a war situation and that aggravates the child-rape situation. In Kenya we are not in a war situation…but there have been cases here where men have raped children …there have been cases that went to court…people have been arrested. Now it is a policy, and this is understood around the world, that we do not name victims of rape. And if it is a child we are even more sensitive about that. We will not name the kid or use pictures of it. Our attention will be focused on the rapist. Our coverage is likely to be very harsh with such people.
Yes, there are more cases of kids being raped and they are getting more coverage in the media… Now the South African example is bizarre and shocking. When some of us heard about it we were stunned. It is not possible that you are going to be cured of AIDS by having sex with a minor! But the mere fact that some people are doing that should force the media to look at the subject. AIDS is a huge issue on this continent… Is this an act of desperation? Is this witchcraft? What exactly are we dealing with? It is a matter that concerns the media and the greater society and it should be condemned.

**Q: It is said that even the fact of coverage of it by the media should not happen because it might give desperate people ideas.**

A: I do not agree. There are instances of students burning their schools down here and we are asking if we should cover it because of the fear of copycat events…but again if we of the media do not cover it …it will still happen. The first case was not because the media gave anyone the idea. No. When the media cover it, they do so to condemn that action … they cannot not cover it for fear…

**Q: But these copycats do it out of desperation…so they might be stimulated by your coverage.**

A: First of all we do not go into the gory details of the crime…we just observe that a certain person has been charged with raping a minor…apparently convinced that it will cure his AIDS …we will not get into those details but we will go a step further to insist that you do not get AIDS by doing that… that the best way to avoid it is prevention …You should not engage in risky behaviour and we will insist that people pass on these messages.

**Q: In areas of conflict where there is a lot of rape of women going on…would you use the same ethics when reporting those horrible acts?**

A: Precisely. The difference here is that in war cases there is more brutalization of people … a soldier with a gun is not only dehumanized by the war but with a gun he gets the feeling that "I have conquered." In his mind he's seeing the enemy…the woman may not be one, but that's how he sees her … But we use the same standards there as we use at home …our emphasis will be on covering the increasing cases of rape and violence and call on organizations like the Organization of African Unity and our neighbours to do whatever they can to stop the atrocities - to go to the aid of these people in the conflict situation.
You see if you expose a child of 10 or 12 in your story then years later that picture is still in the archives and it could be used …you stigmatize them for eternity…we don't want to get into those kinds of situations. We will name the perpetrator, but not the

victim … unless she wants to come forward to tell her story for her own reasons…she'd like it to be a lesson to others. We will never push the case, but if she wants to we will make sure she is certain …we will make it clear that she came forward. It was her choice.

**Q: Have you ever done specials on violence against women?**

A: Not in conflict situations. But we've focused on violence against women as a reality in our society …We did take a risk … there was a lady who was badly burned by acid - it was torture … as editors we said it was a horrid picture - but we took the position to show it because we wanted to shock this society into waking up - we wanted this to be a statement about the increase in violence against women … it's horrible and this is what it looks like - it's happening.

**Q: Have you covered gender-based violence in war?**

A: No …we've been fortunate as a country that we haven't had these brutal wars. But unfortunately, we have men who brutalize women in this country and we try to condemn that. In my case the first time I really heard about the horrible violence against women during war was in the former Yugoslavia. That was when I was watching CNN and there was a lady talking about how everyone talked about the bombs and people running away, but that no one was talking about what is being done to the women during war. That was the first time I realized it was a serious issue.

And as an editor, if I found myself in a conflict situation where that was happening I would definitely focus on those two issues, violence against women and against children. Yes, that would be a special issue for me. But it has taken a long time to come to public attention.

9. Interviews

## Jeanne Ward, gender-based violence research officer with the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium. July 2004

Jeanne Ward
Credit: IRIN

Jeanne Ward is one of the few experts in the relatively new sector of Gender-Based Violence. Here she discusses with IRIN some of the central concerns facing survivors of rape and those who seek to assist them. These include confidentiality, difficulties surrounding data collection, inadequacies in legal systems, and the need to ensure that GBV interventions in war-affected areas are sustainable, that they do not simply fold up once the respective humanitarian agencies pack up and leave.

**QUESTION: What are the key issues of confidentiality when talking about GBV in war areas?**

ANSWER: The international community is advocating a multi-sectoral response and reporting mechanisms to GBV. What this means is that you engage all sectors (health, psycho-social, legal justice and police security sectors)…in providing services to survivors. But one of the challenges in promoting this model is how do we establish systems that promote confidentiality and that don't increase the level of victimization for the survivor? … all sectors that respond have to have confidential reporting systems themselves and they have to have a way of sharing information confidentially.

In conflict settings the only services you have are usually health and sometimes psycho-social … if it's health providers taking down names of survivors and perpetrators (because in many cases women know the perpetrators) where does that information go? Do you keep it in a locked file? Are such things even available? What happens if there's an incursion and all of the files are taken? The challenge is figuring out what kinds of systems to put in place to ensure confidentiality. We're talking about coding information so you're not revealing things about the survivor…

You have to be sure to impress upon people the need for confidentiality, not only for the survivor but [also] for the service provider…We're even trying to get institutions to create release of information authorization forms…This should be standard, but it's not. In conflict settings it is even more important to keep confidentiality.

**Q: What do you need to say to the victims to make them feel secure?**

A: It depends on the setting. In a lot of cases women will share the information if services are available.

Many women are not as afraid in conflict areas, but are more afraid to do so if it is domestic violence. It really depends on where you are. Promoting confidentiality is more about promoting respect for the victim and the rights of the victim. The key issue is to provide concrete support, something that she needs, like medical care in a non-stigmatizing and supportive way. Services have to be free for survivors. This is really critical for them. If they have to pay for it no amount of emotional support will make them come forward.

**Q: What about data collection - what are the issues?**

A: One of the keys is getting good data. There are a few very good GBV specific programmes that collect data in a systematic manner and then monitor that data to try to inform programming. But there are very few agencies that collect data in a systematic way. What does happens is that most data is based on anecdotes and one of the challenges is that you have to define what you want to collect data on so people have to have fairly sophisticated training on what the definitions of GBV are, what the critical components of the data collection are and how to put that all together and then how do you monitor that.

After the monitoring, how do you use the information to consider how to adjust programming? Service statistics are not representative. They don't tell you what the entire population is seeing. You have a biased sample. The prevalence data would give more accurate information but it can be very expensive. It's my feeling that that kind of data leads to policy changes so it needs to be done…People need to commit the resources so it can be done in a technically sophisticated way.

I've been involved over the last couple of years in designing such methodologies in Kosovo and Rwanda, Sierra Leone, East Timor, and Colombia so I know it can be done but it's expensive and there are lots of challenges. Good data packs a huge wallop with policy makers and the public…

**Q: How can the judicial system be used?**

A: Theoretically the legal justice sector has an obligation to respond to the cases reported and ensure safe prosecution. In these settings the statutory and civil laws are not necessarily supportive of women's rights so there may be no protections in the law or they are quite limited. There might be remuneration to the family involved rather than prosecution of the perpetrator or the perpetrator might be required to marry the victim and that exists in many cases in traditional laws…even if you had the resources to go through the process you might not have the laws in place to protect them. If you try to prosecute during conflict the system won't be working, right? And you have all the safety concerns for the victim.

Some countries have special courts like Sri Lanka and Rwanda that try sexual violence. You have the international courts that try cases. In refugee camps there might be host country systems - if they are available. What the GBV community has done is provide training and sensitization courses for the judiciary, for lawyers and police. They've initiated an investigation into what the existing laws are and what protections exist. They've also investigated how the laws are working - like in Kosovo, cases of survivors not being tried in private. There's lots of stigmatization of victims, but after those kinds of investigations they could make recommendations for change to the official bodies - like setting up advocates, and protocols for protection. It's a place to start.

What needs to happen is to have an emergency response protocol that involves reviewing legislation in countries like Sudan, the DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo]. There have to be free legal services…in Brazzaville the women had to pay for legal services so there was no real gain to prosecution. There need to be lawyers who are well trained in helping the survivor to make an informed decision. Often elders gave advice to survivors that could be dangerous.

**Q: Who's doing what?**

A: The UNFPA and the WHO have convened a special task force on GBV which is great and the idea is that it will define what is required within each. In that task force there are ICRC, MSF, UNHCR, UN OCHA, RHRC (a consortium which includes IRC, ARC, CARE, Marie Stopes in the UK, John Snow from D.C., Colombia University and The Women's Commission for Refugee Women). I basically work for all of these organizations.

Outside of these there is CCF [Christian Children's Fund], which is taking a lot of initiative, IMC [International Medical Corp]. There are a number of NGOs that have one or two programmes on the ground. Of all of the NGOs I would say that the IRC has the most programs on the ground. And they only have 10 or 11 programmes in humanitarian settings. MSF is making an effort to train their medical providers on how to deal with GBV survivors, ICRC has a whole women-in-war project, ARC has three programmes.

In Guinea they've created a legal clinic and they've trained local lawyers, but they have a whole case-management process and follow-up and they monitor decisions. That is a very new model but it's something that has promise for the future. Similarly, in Sierra Leone the sexual assault centre has close connections with the police and they monitor cases that they send to court very closely so you have real statistics. Umm, other NGOs are trying to improve their capacity to respond but…

**Q: What about all these small NGOs that are trying to help but lack the resources and are making it up as they go along?**

A: One of the issues is that women who can't provide

the resources needed simply take reports from victims…about levels of violence, but they aren't trained and not necessarily reliable…One of the challenges of the GBV community is to provide services that are sustainable after the big humanitarian crisis is over and the big agencies have left the area.

One of the problems is that these big agencies move into a conflict area, set up their own programs and they don't have the luxury of providing local organizations with the training needed to sustain them or do their own response. The problem is that humanitarian funding is not linked to development funding so when their funding ends, typically the humanitarian programmes shut down. We saw this in Bosnia and East Timor…if you're capacity building in one region and then another but there is no connection between them then you don't get that multi-sectoral response system set up…they never meet.

As far as I know there are no humanitarian NGOs operating in conflict-affected settings that have GBV as a standard component of response. Even for organizations that try, their interventions are so limited.

**Q: In terms of conventions or laws that exist, what's happening?**

A: We have enough evidence from around the globe to anticipate that GBV will be a component of all the conflicts. We don't need more proof that it exists. We need more support for programming that addresses it in terms of response, but more importantly in terms of prevention.

The point is that there's been lots of coverage of GBV. It's as if every time we get one of these reports, it's like something new. How can this atrocity be happening? Well it can because of impunity, because of lack of programming, lack of standards for intervention and so on … stop asking the question how can this happen and start asking how can we address this issue? Mostly it's about commitment- UN, donor, government, and international NGOs.

9. Interviews

## Laurel Patterson, UN Development Programmeme (UNDP) Programme Officer for the Great Lakes Small Arms Reduction Programme. July 2004

The mix of men with weapons around civilians frequently leads to sexual violence. Credit: IRIN

In recent years, researchers have repeatedly ranked Africa's Great Lakes Region as one of the most violent areas for civilians. One of the primary reasons for the dangerous living conditions there is the massive availability of illicit small arms and light weapons. In this interview with IRIN, Ms Patterson shows how gender-based violence is directly linked to the proliferation of small arms in the Great Lakes area.

**Q: What is the link between small arms reduction and gender-based violence?**

ANSWER: Basically the increase in availability of small arms during war means that women are more likely to be raped and less likely to be able to escape. I've been trying to make the link between sexual violence and small arms so I've been looking at rape cases and documenting how small arms are implied in the rape. Often women would say: 'I was held for 5 days and because they had guns I couldn't escape'. You find that guns are held at their heads, in their mouths…so they say: 'what could I do?' We're looking at how the proliferation of arms can lead to an increase of rape both during war and after. So you often have cases where a conflict ends and soldiers go back to their families… with their weapons and they can perpetuate crimes…because these DDR processes never seem to collect all the arms. They give in their old weapons, keep their new ones, go back home, get frustrated, can't find work so they use their small arms to dominate, […] and rape in many cases.

**Q: Do you have any statistics on this situation?**

A: It's difficult to get accurate small arms data and difficult to get accurate sexual violence data, so finding accurate data linking the two is almost impossible unless research is specifically undertaken on a large and long-term scale to look at this.

**Q: What about identifying solutions?**

A: During the demobilization process we're looking various training processes to help ex-combatants learn different sets of skills. We're also hoping they are getting information on women's rights and human rights generally. On the reintegration front, which is the hardest to get funding for, we want to prepare the community for these ex-combatants - what to expect. Then sitting with them and really doing proper reintegration work …so when they go back they are less likely to get involved in domestic violence and abuse, which is now a common event.

But looking at what to do in war, we're looking at how to halt the proliferation of small arms…and try to raise awareness of the dangers of small arms. And on the gender side, we're trying to de-stigmatize rape. If you're shot dead with a gun everyone feels sorry for you but if you're raped with a gun it's your fault!

**Q: How do you de-stigmatize?**

A: They're finding that women who are raped in front of family members are more likely to report cases. However there is also some evidence that they are also therefore less likely to be stigmatized and more likely to have family support, but I'm not sure how often this is the case, and may have been isolated to research in DRC.

The question, 'where are the small arms?' in all of these discussions of sexual violence is being left out. Where are these small arms coming from after conflict? The whole trafficking dimension… People are looking at the trafficking dimension in some detail, however, linking trafficking of arms and increased instances of sexual violence.

**Q: What are the main issues of reintegration of ex-combatants?**

A: There's training, and courses like how to manage their finances after war. But what's important there is to have the whole family involved, not just the men. What often happens is that people are not properly disarmed or demilitarized. So that they often stay in their old units. They haven't changed their mindset at all. That's the situation in a lot of these countries. There are not a lot of alternatives to the army so men go back to arms…or they loot or go into organized crime. What you also find is that women are not consulted enough before the men return to their communities. Women are totally unprepared. They don't know what to expect. They're worried. So people are unprepared and reconciliation is not properly done because it's a long-term process.

My feeling is that if they don't do some of these long-term reintegration programmes with the whole community, it's not going to work. And I don't think enough attention has been paid to this area because people think other things are more important.

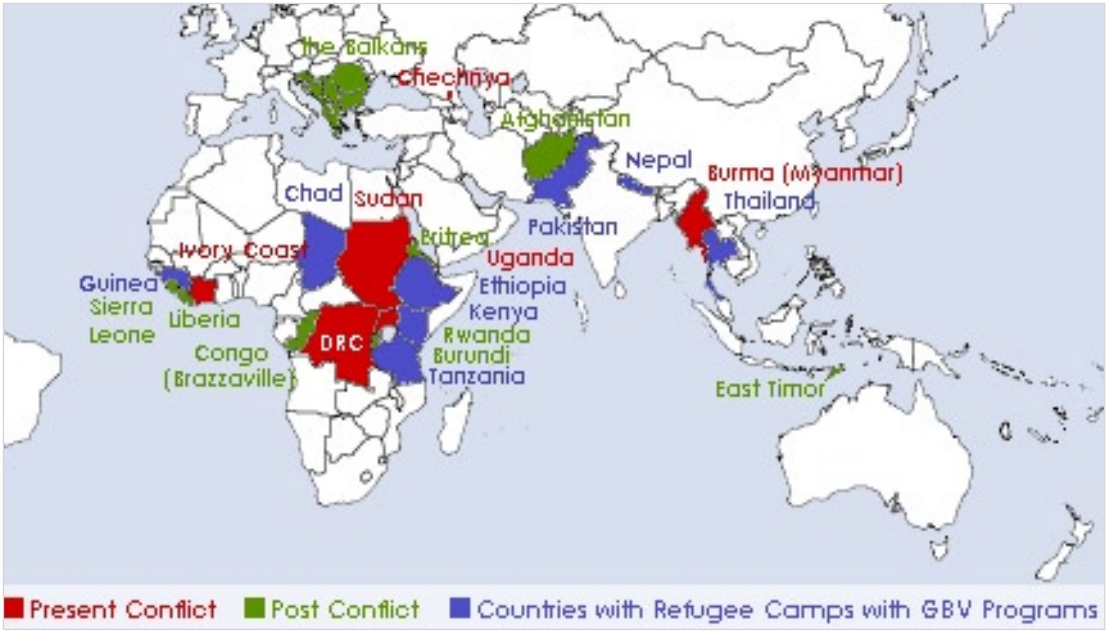
**Q: What research are you currently working on?**

A: In Burundi we are conducting a short-term assessment (8 weeks).What we're hoping to understand is how women were affected by the war and how they participated in the war. Because a lot of women did participate in Burundi. They acted as scouts and they sometimes did traffic in small arms. And they may continue to keep arms in their homes. I'd like to speak to these women and ask them what they would do at the community level, then try to design programmes that would allow them to be involved in the whole demobilization process.

For those interested in prototype statements on the link between women, gender-based violence and small arms, check the IANSA Women's Statement on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons Women's Caucus, United Nations Conference on Small Arms, 2001 at www.peacewomen.org

*The UNDP small arms website is located at www.undp.org*

## Gender-based violence in countries in conflict & post conflict




UNIFEM - A Portal on Women, Peace & Security
www.womenwarpeace.org >> Select: Systematic and Widespread Rape in Conflict

**For specific information or enquiries concerning IRIN documentaries Please contact:**
David Gough
IRIN Film Unit
Tel: +254 20 621994
Email Address: gough@IRINnews.org

**Headquarters, IRIN Central & East Africa,**
IRIN Horn Of Africa - Nairobi
UNOCHA House, UN Crescent, Off UN Avenue,
P.O. Box 30218, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 622147
Fax: +254 20 622129 Or 624356
Email Address: Irin@IRINnews.org

**IRIN-Central Asia - Ankara**
Room B03, UN House,
Birlik Mah, 2 Cadde, 11,06610,
Cankaya, Ankara, Turkey
Tel: +90 312 454 1177/75
Fax: +90 312 495 4166
Email Address: Sean@IRINnews.org

**IRIN – Kabul**
WFP Guesthouse # 5
Shashdarak,
Kabul,
Afghanistan
Tel: +93 (0)70 281124
Email Address: shoaib@IRINnews.org

**IRIN - Southern Africa - Johannesburg**
3rd Floor, Sandton City Office Towers, Rivonia Road, Sandton 2146
P.O. Box 1617, Parklands, 2121, Republic Of South Africa
Tel: +27 11 895 1900
Fax: (Admin) +27 11 784 6223
Email Address: Irin-Sa@Irin.Org.Za

**IRIN - West Africa - Dakar**
Sur La Vdn - Villa N° 9368 Sacré-Coeur 3,
Bp: 45792 Dakar-Fann, Senegal, Code Postale 12523
Tel: +221 867 27 30
Fax: +221 867 25 85
Email Address: Irin-Wa@Irinnews.Org

**IRIN Liaison Office - New York**
United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017, USA
Tel: +212 963 1234 Or 212 963 5699
Fax: +212 963 1040

**IRIN Liaison Office – Geneva**
Office A827, OCHA/ESB/IRIN,
Palais Des Nations, 8-14 Avenue De La Paix, Ch-1211
Geneva 10, Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 917 1135
Fax: +41 22 917 0067
Email Address: Joanne@IRINnews.org

**IRIN Coordinator, Ms. Pat Banks**
Tel: +254 20 622133
Email Address: Pat@IRINnews.org