

# Women's Bodies as Battle Grounds: Sexual Violence in Conflict Situations

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Isis-WICCE

# About Isis-WICCE

- Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) is a women's human rights organization whose mandate is to strengthen women's leadership in conflict and post conflict settings to fully participate in peace building, good governance and development.
- Founded in 1974 in Geneva Switzerland, the organization relocated to Africa, in Uganda in 1994; to tap the voices of African women and link them to the debates and campaigns taking place at national, regional and international levels.

# About Isis-WICCE

Since 1996, Isis-WICCE has been engaged in researching and documenting the experiences of women in situations of armed conflict in Africa and globally in order to;

- expose the violations committed against women women's roles in conflict situations
- Use the data to strengthen women's views with policy and advocacy
- Provide facts (data) for post conflict planning

# Sexual Violence in Conflict

- Victims of modern armed conflict are far more likely to be civilians than soldiers, mostly women and children
- Women face different forms of violence, which are systematically deployed to achieve military or political objectives.
- Rape is used to terrorize the population, break up families, destroy communities and sometimes deliberately used to infect women with HIV or render them incapable of bearing children
- It has been used to change ethnic make-up of the next generation.

# Forms of Sexual Violence during Conflict

- Rape
- Gang rape
- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual slavery
- Forced impregnation

# Global Statistics of Sexual Violence in Conflict

According to UN reports,

- Up to 60,000 women were raped during the war in Bosnia (1992-95)
- 14,200 rape cases registered in South Kivu, DRC between 2005-2007 just 2% of perpetrators were ever called to account. An average of 40 women are raped daily in South Kivu, DRC
- In Sierra Leone, between 50,000 and 64,000 internally displaced women suffered sexual assault at the hands of combatants (1991-2002)
- Rwandan genocide memorial notes that 500,000 women were raped during 100 days of conflict. 10,000 genocide-related trials heard by Rwandan courts, only 3% included convictions for sexual violence.

# Current conflicts

- A report published by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network estimates 6,000 cases of Syrian women being sexually assaulted since the start of the war in March 2011. (Syrian National Reconciliation Commission is reporting 37,000 cases of rape in the suburbs of Damascus).

# Isis-WICCE Research in Conflict Settings

- A situation analysis of the women survivors of the 1989-2003 armed conflict in Liberia.
- Women's experiences during Armed Conflict in Southern Sudan, 1983 – 2005; The Case of Juba County – Central Equatorial State.
- Documentation of Teso Women's Experiences of Armed Conflict; 1987-2001.
- Women's Experiences of Armed Conflict in Uganda Gulu District, 1986-1999.
- Women's experiences of armed conflict in Uganda: Luweero district 1980-1986.



# Findings

- Luweero, out of 92 respondents 88 of respondents reported having been sexually abused or knowing someone who was sexually abused and 56% were raped or know someone who has been raped
- In Gulu, out of 559 women interviewed 55% reported having experienced rape or attempted rape or forced marriage.
- In Liberia, out of 515 women interviewed, 62.5% experienced some form of sexual torture. About 20% of women had objects forcefully inserted in their vagina

# Findings

Rampant sexual violence The studies revealed an average of 65% of women experienced some form of sexual violence.

*“The worst thing about the Soldiers was having forced sex with women one after another.... the NRA soldiers started sexually abusing the women in the compound. One woman was forced to have sex with six NRA men, and this went on for two days”.*

**Respondent , Luweero Research**

# Women's voices

- *“I am from Kuda and my husband is a chief. When the conflict broke out, my husband was in Torit. We ran in the nearby bush. We came and collected vegetables and we went back in the bush. It happened one day when my daughter in law delivered and she could not sleep in the bush with the baby. I found the soldiers were in the house trying to rape her, then I told them that this lady had just delivered two days ago, why then do you want to rape her?”*
- *They said that they can leave her and they wanted me. I said that I am an old woman and instead they replied that they enjoyed old women better. So they raped me; they were six in number. They just raped me outside in the open. Some of them were beating me and others holding my hands and legs.* **Juba, S.Sudan**

# Women's voices

*“The Rebels never left a breast-feeding woman to go without having been raped. They believed that breast-feeding mother’s were free from the HIV virus. They have the belief that a woman with children is not infected with gonorrhoea”.*

Voice from Teso research

# Women's voices

## Violence against women's bodies

*“The rebels would start debating whether a pregnant woman was carrying a boy or a girl to show that they had power over life and death and to prove how powerful they were. They would then split the woman's stomach to see what she was carrying. And right there they gave themselves the power to destroy two lives or more in case of twins just to prove a point”. (Male Key Informant, Monrovia)*

# Women's voices

*“Four MPFL soldiers raped me...they threatened me that if I refuse, they will kill me with my children. I accepted because I wanted to save my children and I knew they were serious...other women were raped, mutilated and then killed for me to survive together with my children”.* **Woman respondent from Liberia**

# Women's voices

- *“What bothers me is my poor health. From the time I was raped, I get frequent swellings and wounds in my vagina, heavy and painful menstruation periods lasting for about fourteen days. As a result, I spend sleepless nights thinking about my situation. At times, I don't like to meet people, especially those who know me...I went to Atatur Hospital last year. They told me to go back so that my uterus is removed, but I have no money. I'm waiting to die.”* **A woman respondent from Soroti**

# Findings

- Women survivors of sexual violence reported reproductive health problems such as; abnormal vaginal bleeding, abnormal vaginal discharge, infertility, leaking urine and chronic abdominal pain
- 68% of women respondents had at least one gynaecological complaint



# Isis-WICCE Response

- Through her theory of change

*‘If we provide healing for women’s bodies, mind and spirit; and provide them with concrete skills and tools for peace; provide opportunities for them to utilize their potential; they will consistently advocate for responsive intervention and policies; then the movement of women peace activists will take charge, and consequently contribute to a peaceful world’.*

# Response

- Short term emergency medical interventions.  
The medical interventions have enabled over 2,000 women to receive gynecological treatment and surgery, 2000 received counseling and trauma management, and 3,500 received general treatment.

# Challenges

- Marginalization and exclusion of women's peace efforts in mainstream peace negotiation processes.
- Inability to address multiple effects of armed conflicts on women
- Persistent Militarism that target women's bodies

# Response by the UN Security Council

- Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000): increase the participation of women in the 'prevention and resolution of conflicts' and 'maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Protect the rights of civilian women and girls and incorporate policies and procedures that protect women from gender based crimes such as rape and sexual assault.
- Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008): called for an end to the use of acts of sexual violence against women and girls as a tactic of war and end to impunity of perpetrators. Re-emphasized women's participation in peace building.

# Response by the UN Security Council

- Security Council Resolution 1889 (2009): reaffirmed resolution 1325, condemned continuing sexual violence against women in conflict situations, and urged the UN member States and civil society to consider the need for protection and empowerment of women and girls, including those associated with armed groups, in post-conflict programming.
- Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010): asked the Secretary General to list those parties credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of sexual violence in situations of conflict on the Council's agenda. It also called for the establishment of monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements specific to conflict related sexual violence.
- Security Council Resolution 2122 (2013): women's participation, protection, access to justice and psychosocial support

# Regional responses

- The International Conference of the Great Lakes Region SGBV Declaration (2011)  
Request member States to fast track response to sexual gender based violence survivors, through providing health, legal and psychosocial support to women survivors.

# Recommendations..

- The need to address the root causes of conflicts rather than symptoms of conflicts.
- Governments to implement laws and policies put in place to address sexual violence and provide adequate budgets.
- Governments need to put in place special programmes to address reproductive health complications in conflict settings.
- Women play a crucial role in attitude change. It is important to build their skills in early warning, peacebuilding and post conflict reconstruction. The use of law, protocols and government policies alone will not succeed.

**THANK YOU  
FOR  
LISTENING**