

## The Independent Experts' Assessment

on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women  
and the Role of Women in Peace-building

**Women  
War  
Peace**

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# WOMEN WAR PEACE



## *In Modern Conflicts, Women Face New Levels of Brutality – and Fight for Peace*

The victims in today's armed conflicts are far more likely to be civilians than soldiers. Some 70 per cent of the casualties in recent conflicts were non-combatants – most of them women and children.

■ Chantal, a Rwandan woman now living in a United Nations centre for refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, spent five years of her life as a sex slave to mass murderers who also used her as a porter and human shield.

Maria, a community organizer from northern Colombia, received a videotape of a colleague being tortured and killed. "The message was clear: If I continued with my activities, I'd be next."

Asha Hagi Elmi, an activist in Somalia and a delegate to the National Peace Conference in 2000, understood that peace could only come from cross-clan reconciliation, not official negotiations among warlords and faction leaders.

"We lobbied for a quota for women in the future legislature, the Transitional National Assembly. But we faced opposition from the male delegates. 'No man,' they told us, 'would agree to be represented by women.'"

### "Epidemic of violence"

These women's stories are but a few of the testimonies presented in a new report on women and armed conflict, *Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and the Role of Women in Peace-building* (Progress of the World's Women 2002, Vol. 1). The report concludes that while women have

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always been among wars' victims, in recent conflicts they have been systematically singled out for sexual violence and other atrocities. Where this has occurred, the violence has largely been undocumented and perpetrators have frequently gone unpunished. Moreover, despite the fact that women have fostered numerous initiatives to prevent, stop and recover from war, they rarely have access to political power structures or are included in official peace negotiations as mandated in 2000 by the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

The Independent Experts' Assessment was commissioned by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in close collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in response to Resolution 1325. The Assessment was conducted by Elisabeth Rehn, a former Finnish defence minister, presidential candidate and United Nations human rights investigator, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a banking executive and a former finance minister and presidential candidate in Liberia.

During visits to 14 war zones in Africa, the Middle East, South America, Asia and Eastern Europe, the Experts found shocking evidence of an "epidemic of violence" against women and girls during recent conflicts. They also found that while women were rarely part of official peace talks or reconstruction efforts, they have played a pivotal role by campaigning and working for peace at the grassroots level, often working across traditional dividing lines and borders.

### **Working for peace and justice**

During armed conflicts, women often experience violence, forced pregnancy, abduction, sexual abuse and slavery. Their bodies have been used as "envelopes" to send messages to the perceived enemy.

"The harm, silence and shame women experience in war is pervasive, but their redress is almost non-existent," the report states.

Women do not enjoy equal status with men in any society and during armed conflict, a pre-existing culture of discrimination is often exacerbated. Even after hostilities end, changes are rarely made to ensure that

women and women's rights are protected.

"We saw the scars, the pain and the humiliation. We heard accounts of rape camps, gang rapes and mutilation, of murder and sexual slavery," the Experts say in the report.

"Yet, time and again, we met women who had survived trauma and found the courage and the will to recommit to life. They were struggling to rebuild their community and remake their lives."

All over the world, the report found, women have challenged militarism and urged reconciliation over retribution. They have opposed the development, testing and proliferation of nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction and the small arms trade. They have transformed peace processes on every continent by organizing across political, religious, and ethnic affiliations.

### **An equitable role for women**

In their recommendations, the Experts convey women's call to governments and the international community to help stop violence. The women also demand an equitable presence at peace negotiations as well as in legislatures and in the planning and operation of humanitarian interventions and peacekeeping missions.

The Experts also call on governments and the international community to adopt and vigorously enforce laws aimed at protecting women and ensuring their human rights. They recommend that an international Truth and Reconciliation Commission be set up in order to highlight the plight of female war victims.

The Experts also call for more female candidates in post-conflict elections, the appointment of more women to United Nations peacekeeping and diplomatic posts, and a greater role for women in peacemaking and post-conflict reconstruction activities.

Procedures and mechanisms to investigate, report, prosecute and remedy violence against women in war must be strengthened, the Experts say: "Otherwise the historic refusal to acknowledge and punish crimes against women will continue."

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### Elisabeth Rehn, Independent Expert

■ Elisabeth Rehn's distinguished career has included serving as Minister of Equality Affairs and Minister of Defence of Finland; Member of the European Parliament; UN Under-Secretary-General; UN Special Rapporteur for the Situation of Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She has also been a candidate for the Finnish presidency.

Ms. Rehn is currently an Advisory Council Member of Intellibridge, a Washington D.C. research firm and a member of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) Review Board. She has been a member of the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) since 1994; a member of the International Steering Committee of Engendering the Peace

Process; Chair of the Finnish Association for Education and Training of Women in Crisis Prevention since 1997; and Chair of the World Wildlife Fund, Finland since 2000.

Previously, Ms. Rehn has served as Vice-chair of the Finnish Red Cross, Chair of the Standing Group of the National Committees of UNICEF, Vice-chair of the UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), member of the UNFPA Advisory Committee for Implementation of ICPD decisions and Chair of the Youth Conference of Climate 2000 in The Hague.

Ms. Rehn's early memories of the Soviet invasion of Finland give her a personal understanding of the horrors of war. As Defence Minister, she was a strong advocate for those who wanted to perform civil service rather than compulsory military service. However, says Ms. Rehn, it was in Bosnia as the UN Secretary-General's Special Repre-



sentative that she experienced first hand the gap between the decision-making level and those who are suffering on the ground.

Ms. Rehn has two doctor of science degrees, one in politics and the other in economics (H.C). She has been married for 47 years and has four children.

### Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Independent Expert

■ In a professional life that has spanned over 30 years, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has held a number of prominent positions, including Minister of Finance of Liberia; President of the Liberia Bank for Development and Investment; Vice President of Citicorp, Africa regional office; Vice President of Hong Kong Equator Bank; and Senior Loan Officer of the World Bank. She was one of seven international eminent persons selected by the Organization of African Unity in 1999 to investigate the Rwanda genocide.

Ms. Johnson Sirleaf is currently Chairperson of the Open Society Institute West Africa (OSIWA), part of the Soros Foundation Network. She also consults regularly for the UN Economic Commission for Africa as an External Adviser and is a member of the Advisory Board of the Modern Africa Growth and Investment Company (MAGIC). She is also Senior Adviser and West/Central Africa Representative of Modern Africa Fund Managers (MAFM), which has offices

in Washington D.C. and Johannesburg, and the Chair and CEO of Kormah Investment and Development Corporation (KODIC), a financial and management advisory consultancy firm incorporated in Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire. Additionally, she is the founder and key supporter of the community development NGO, Measuagoon, in Liberia.

A presidential candidate in the 1997 Liberia general elections, Ms. Johnson Sirleaf came second in a field of thirteen. Prior to that, she served for five years as Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa of UNDP with the rank of Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations. She has represented Liberia on the boards of several international and regional financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

Ms. Johnson Sirleaf has first hand experience of armed conflict. During the 1980 coup d'etat in Liberia she was one of only



four government ministers who escaped assassination, while 13 others were shot and killed.

Ms. Johnson Sirleaf holds a Master of Public Administration degree from Harvard

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**DOCUMENTATION**

# Security Council Resolution 1325

The Security Council,

Recalling its resolutions 1261 (1999) of 25 August 1999, 1265 (1999) of 17 September 1999, 1296 (2000) of 19 April 2000 and 1314 (2000) of 11 August 2000, as well as relevant statements of its President and recalling also the statement of its President, to the press on the occasion of the United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace of 8 March 2000 (SC/6816),

Recalling also the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/52/231) as well as those contained in the outcome document of the twenty-third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the twenty-first century" (A/S-23/10/Rev.1), in particular those concerning women and armed conflict,

Bearing in mind the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the primary responsibility of the Security Council under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security,

Expressing concern that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements, and recognizing the consequent impact this has on durable peace and reconciliation,

Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution,

Reaffirming also the need to implement fully international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts,

Emphasizing the need for all parties to ensure that mine clearance and mine awareness programmes take into account the special needs of women and girls,

Recognizing the urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and in this regard noting the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations (S/2000/693),

Recognizing also the importance of the recommendation contained in the statement of its President to the press of 8 March 2000 for specialized training for all peacekeeping personnel on the protection, special needs and human rights of women and children in conflict situations,

Recognizing that an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and

security, Noting the need to consolidate data on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls,

1. Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;

2. Encourages the Secretary-General to implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes;

3. Urges the Secretary-General to appoint more women as special representatives and envoys to pursue good offices on his behalf, and in this regard calls on Member States to provide candidates to the Secretary-General, for inclusion in a regularly updated centralized roster;

4. Further urges the Secretary-General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel;

5. Expresses its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations and urges the Secretary-General to ensure that, where appropriate, field operations include a gender component;

6. Requests the Secretary-General to provide to Member States training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women, as well as on the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peace-building measures, invites Member States to incorporate these elements as well as HIV/AIDS awareness training into their national training programmes for military and civilian police personnel in preparation for deployment and further requests the Secretary-General to ensure that civilian personnel of peacekeeping operations receive similar training;

7. Urges Member States to increase their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programmes, inter alia, the United Nations Fund for Women and United Nations Children's Fund, and by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant bodies;

8. Calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective, including, inter alia: (a) The special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction; (b) Measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements; (c) Measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary;

9. Calls upon all parties to armed conflict to respect fully

international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls as civilians, in particular the obligations applicable to them under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols thereto of 1977, the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Protocol thereto of 1967, the Convention Security Council - 5 - Press Release SC/6942 4213th Meeting (PM) 31 October 2000 on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979 and the Optional Protocol thereto of 1999 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and the two Optional Protocols thereto of 25 May 2000, and to bear in mind the relevant provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;

10. Calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict;

11. Emphasizes the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes including those relating to sexual violence against women and girls, and in this regard, stresses the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible from amnesty provisions;

12. Calls upon all parties to armed conflict to respect the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements, and to take into account the particular needs of women and girls, including in their design, and recalls its resolution 1208 (1998) of 19 November 1998;

13. Encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants;

14. Reaffirms its readiness, whenever measures are adopted under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, to give consideration to their potential impact on the civilian population, bearing in mind the special needs of women and girls, in order to consider appropriate humanitarian exemptions;

15. Expresses its willingness to ensure that Security Council missions take into account gender considerations and the rights of women, including through consultation with local and international women's groups;

16. Invites the Secretary-General to carry out a study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict resolution, and further invites him to submit a report to the Security Council on the results of this study and to make this available to all Member States of the United Nations;

17. Requests the Secretary-General, where appropriate, to include in his reporting to the Security Council, progress on gender mainstreaming throughout peacekeeping missions and all other aspects relating to women and girls;

18. Decides to remain actively seized of the matter."



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### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

# During Armed Conflict Women's Bodies Become A Battleground

In today's armed conflicts, more than 70 per cent of the casualties are civilians -- and most of them are women and children. As the Experts' Assessment documents, this is not an accident. Women, especially, are systematically targeted by armed forces, rebel groups and local militia.

Violence against women has reached epidemic proportions in these situations, as women have become the primary targets for those who use terror as a tactic of war.

Women's bodies become a battleground over which opposing forces struggle. They are raped as a way to humiliate the men they are related to, who are often forced to watch the assault.

In societies where ethnicity is inherited through the male line, "enemy" women are raped and forced to bear children.

Women who are already pregnant are forced to miscarry through violent attacks.

Women are kidnapped and used as sexual slaves to service troops, as well as to cook for soldiers and carry their loads from camp to camp. They are purposely infected with HIV/AIDS, a slow, painful murder.

Trafficking and sexual slavery are inextricably linked to conflict. Women are trafficked out of one country into another to be used in forced labour schemes that often include forced sex-work. Women are abducted by armed groups and forced to accompany them on raids, and to provide everything from food to sexual services.

Many sexual slaves are also used for dangerous work like demining contested areas, forced to risk their lives to make a field or a hillside safe for soldiers.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that as many as 2 million women are trafficked across borders annually, many of them coming from or through conflict areas.

According to the Independent Experts, protection and support for women survivors of violence are woefully inadequate. Their access to protection, social services and legal remedies is limited. Survivors of violence need safe places to go for help as well as medical support,

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines such violence as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private."

Forty-five countries have legislation protecting women against domestic violence, but many of these laws are not regularly enforced, especially during periods of conflict.

"People are living through an extraordinary drama here in eastern Congo," a UN official in Goma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo said.

"From Pweto down near the Zambian border right up to Aru, on the Sudan/Uganda border, it's a black hole where no one is safe and where no outsider goes. Women take a risk when they go out to the fields or on a road to a market.

"Any day they can be stripped naked, humiliated and raped in public. Many, many people no longer sleep at home, though sleeping in the bush is equally unsafe. Every night, another village is attacked. It could be any group, no one knows, but they always take women and girls away."

resources and security.

Some work is being done, but much more is needed. In Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Experts met local NGOs who were providing telephone hotlines, shelters, advocacy campaigns and policy research. One group, Medica Zenica, has a mobile clinic that provides obstetrical and gynaecological services to women in remote villages and displaced persons camps. It also trains local institutions in methods of caring for traumatized women. But these *ad hoc* efforts need to become routine and institutionalized.

Law enforcement officials can do more to protect women. Training in Cambodia and Croatia as well as political and legal advocacy in Liberia are aided by UNIFEM's Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women. But here too, further effort is needed by both international and national groups, the Experts write.

States, the Experts continue, must adopt special legislation incorporating human rights, humanitarian and international criminal law into their own legal systems.

Although the existing international legal framework prohibits and criminalizes violence against women, Gay J. McDougall, the former UNSpecial Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, recommends that it "must better reflect the experience of women and the true nature of the harms to them, particularly during armed conflict." She calls for the "further development of the legal framework through consistent, gender-responsive practice."

The UN Human Rights Committee reaffirmed this view by establishing that the right to gender equality is not merely a right to non-discrimination, but one that requires affirmative action.

In March 2000, the Committee called on states to take special measures to protect women from rape, abduction or other forms of gender-based violence. In Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, the Security Council made the same call.

