

OxfordMUN

Asia Conference 2021



Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

#BACKGROUND GUIDE



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Cover Letter

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) of Oxford Global Model United Nations 2020. I am a first-year History and Politics student at Christ Church, Oxford, who was born in Bangalore, India but brought up in London for the majority of my life. I first started MUN in 2014 at the tender age of 13 and have been MUNing ever since, eventually running my own school conference in London in 2019. I have loved the sheer breadth of experiences **MUN provides, getting together some of the world's youngest, yet brightest minds and attacking some of the world's most important issues. I hope you get as much out of it as I have.**

This committee stands out to me among the rest. It really speaks to what international, intersectional feminism should look like: dealing with issues which affect women across the globe and putting them in a position where they are the agents of their own potential. It is an issue that we in the West come back to time and time again, whilst we almost distance ourselves from the struggles of women in other parts of the world. I hope debate on these topics will encourage you to apply this new focus to your own feminism and the way you see interactions between men and women in the world and at home.

I look forward to seeing what you make of them.

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Topic: Women in Zones of Conflict — Protection from Gender-based Violence and Female Participation in Peacekeeping Efforts

Statement of the Problem

Throughout recent history, violence against women and girls has been part of armed conflict. Women and girls are killed, injured, widowed and orphaned. They are abducted into sexual slavery or forced to exchange sex or marriage for survival. The facts are stark: up to 50,000 women were raped in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and up to ten times that number during the Rwanda genocide. During the height of fighting in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo **in 2008, it's estimated nearly 40 women were raped a day in one province alone.** Today, renewed fighting in the eastern part of the country has led to an increase in sexual and gender-based violence. Long after armed conflict has ended, survivors continue to experience physical injuries, psychological trauma and social stigma. Guilt, shame and anger tears apart relationships. Individuals are unable to carry out normal activities amidst their memories, including taking part in post conflict society.

Some changes have occurred. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 affirms that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in the forging of lasting peace. Much of the implementation of Resolution 1325 is up to individual member states and their creation of National Action Plans (NAPs). As of late January 2018, 72 nations have created National Action Plans. To some extent, this has led to greater political participation. However,

there have been limits to the extent of female participation in actual post conflict resolution as well the actual prevention of sexual abuse in times of conflict.

Current Situation

In recent times, there have emerged extensive accounts of violence against women in times of armed conflict. Systematic rape and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) are increasingly used as weapons of war in armed conflicts in different regions of the world. Furthermore, the use of rape to reinforce policies of ethnic cleansing and the establishment of camps explicitly intended for sexual torture and the forcible impregnation of women are tragic developments which mark a definite escalation of violence against women in situations of armed conflicts. GBV in conflict and post conflict areas can take many forms including rape, slavery, forced impregnation/miscarriages, sterilisation, kidnapping/trafficking, forced nudity, and disease transmission, with rape and sexual abuse being among the most common. In addition to rape, sexual abuse is also prevalent, particularly in the forms of forced nudity, strip searches, and other publicly humiliating and violating acts. These acts and other acts of sexual violence, such as forced impregnation or forced miscarriages, are often part of an intentional strategy of war, used to destabilize the civilian population and violate the honour of the opposing force.

Abduction and slavery are also frequent forms of GBV in conflict areas, where civilian girls and women are kidnapped by raiding military or rebel forces and **taken back to the soldiers' camp to provide both sexual and domestic services.**

Such actions are sometimes disguised as a marriage, despite international **definitions which suggest that such ‘marriages’ should be regarded as crimes of enslavement.** These women—sometimes referred to as ‘bush wives’—often suffer psychological harm and have difficulty reintegrating into society following their enslavement. Personal testimonies abound both from families who have not heard from their daughters since they were kidnapped by military forces and from girls who have lived to recount being abducted and forced to travel with the soldiers, acting as both sexual and domestic slaves either for one particular soldier or the entire unit. Girls are also bartered between military units, trafficked across international borders to be sold, or traded to an allied military unit. Such kidnapping and trafficking practices occur not only at the site of conflict, but also at refugee camps, adding a new level of terror to what was intended to be a safe location.

Post conflict societies also experience practices of GBV. Indeed, rape and other forms of sexual violence have been cited as major factors in undermining post conflict peace processes. It is relatively common for a society to experience an increase in trafficking, forced prostitution, domestic violence, and sexual violence following a major conflict. Some of these issues, particularly domestic violence and trafficking, may reach higher levels after the conclusion of a conflict than during the conflict. The post conflict rise in incidents of domestic violence, for example, has led to speculation of a relationship between these forms of GBV and the availability of small arms, an increased tolerance of violence within society, and men having been engaged in military violence during the conflict.^{vii}

Recent developments, including the rise in violent extremism and mass migration, drew attention to the attendant risk of trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual violence/exploitation. Among the perpetrators are hybrid criminal-terrorist networks, which have used the bodies of women and girls as a form of currency in the political economy of war.

The links between gender-based violence and a local, regional or international conflict may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator (often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group, including a terrorist entity or network), the profile of the victim (who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a persecuted political, ethnic or religious minority, or is targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity), the climate of impunity (which is generally associated with State collapse), cross border consequences (such as displacement or trafficking in persons) and/or violations of the provisions of a ceasefire agreement. Gender-based violence also encompasses trafficking in persons when committed in situations of conflict for the purpose of sexual violence/exploitation.

It is important that we also recognise that international peacekeeping efforts have also been linked to GBV. Most notably, after peacekeeping missions in Haiti in 2011, there have been many reported cases of gender-based violence enacted by UN appointed officials and women raising children who are legacies of their assault.^{viii} **While today's headlines** are not filled with such stories of horrific abuses of power, it is important that the committee look to rectify what is a gross hypocrisy.

The idea of engaging women in post conflict peacekeeping efforts is a clear and viable solution to this problem. Women have and are at the forefront of the peacekeeping movement. An example of a woman who has been leading post conflict rehabilitation is Winnie Byanyima, who has experience tackling issues which affect women in post conflict Uganda. Her work as a member of parliament and in government was crucial to protecting women in such dangerous positions. While of course many conflicts and areas of conflict are far less well represented when it comes to female participation, there is some precedent for women to take action. Moreover, the work conducted by NGOs and charities in conflict zones, equally important but often less well documented, often involves women helping women. In areas where male peacekeepers are culturally barred from helping women, female peacekeepers and aid workers play an even more critical role.

Relevant UN Actions

The 1990s saw the first sexual violence programme in refugee camps in western Tanzania. Since then, GBV prevention and response, as with humanitarian protection more generally, has become an integral aspect of humanitarian action. The past decade has witnessed the development of policy frameworks, programme guidance and standards and capacity-building for preventing and responding to GBV in humanitarian emergencies. The responsibilities of all humanitarian actors to prevent and respond to GBV are now clearly spelt out in the Inter-**Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) *Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings***, first published in 2005 and currently under revision. This document outlines actions to be taken across

humanitarian sectors to prevent and respond to GBV, sexual violence in particular. Many humanitarian agencies, NGOs and UN agencies alike, have resources dedicated to GBV, with technical advisors in headquarters and in the field; the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has Standard Operating Procedures (SOPS) for GBV in place in virtually every camp under its jurisdiction.^{ix}

Security Council resolution 2106 (2013) sent a strong message to those in conflict zones that sexual violence will not be tolerated and this has been a well-established maxim for many years now.^x In this regard, the increased presence **of women's protection** advisers, who are responsible for convening the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence in the field, has improved the availability and quality of information. **Currently, 34 women's protection advisers are deployed** in eight mission settings. All six peacekeeping missions with mandates that include the protection of civilians have established the monitoring arrangements and incorporated the matrix of early warning indicators of conflict-related sexual violence into their broader protection structures. Two special political missions have also begun to establish these monitoring arrangements. A concerted effort to enhance prevention, early warning and swift responses to this historically hidden crime will require dedicated human and financial resources commensurate with the scale of the challenge.

Reporting directly to my Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Team of Experts is composed of specialists from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner

for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), supplemented by a roster of experts with a range of specialisations.

The United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network, which consists of 13 entities and is chaired by my Special Representative, is aimed at strengthening sexual violence prevention and response through a coordinated, coherent and comprehensive approach. In 2016, through the United Nations Action multi-partner trust fund, catalytic funding was provided for the deployment of **the first women's protection adviser to Iraq. An international expert** was deployed to Mali on secondment from the Government of Switzerland to support the development of a national strategy on gender-based violence/sexual violence in conflict. In 2016, the network also funded five projects in the Middle East and North Africa, which support primarily Syrian and Iraqi survivors, including refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.

Proposed Solutions

Strengthening the capacity of national institutions is critical to ensuring accountability for past crimes, as well as prevention and deterrence for the future. This has been a well-known avenue for UN actions in the past, but it is important that delegates think about how and why institutions break down and fail to protect women. Delegates will need to look at their own institutions and seek to assess if they could and would benefit from aid at the international level.

Some regulation of UN Peacekeeping action is necessary. A possible idea would be to impose quotas, mandating a certain proportion of the peacekeeping force

is female and requiring that there is some female participation at a high-level. Particularly when it comes to post conflict societies, a resolution to draw up a report or an investigation into the treatment of women would be a step in the right direction.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer

- How do we implement the widely agreed upon and commended spirits of UNSCR 1325?
- How do we regulate what national and sub-national actors do in times of war?
- **What role do UN Peacekeeping efforts play in promoting women's rights and how do we regulate peacekeepers' actions?**
- How do we promote women to positions of power in post conflict societies?
- Is it possible to draw up a widely agreed upon framework for **peacekeeping through which women's interests are taken into account** without being tokenised?

Bloc Positions

UNSCR 1325 was passed unanimously. This implies that all the security council **members, at least in theory, support the idea of protecting women's rights when** it comes to violent conflict zones. The attitudes that they espouse when it comes to putting in place concrete measures, such as UN regulation and investigations in conflict zones and UN advice when it comes to post conflict institutional

building is likely to vary according to how co-operative individual governments are likely to be.

More conservative countries, such as those in the Middle East, are moreover less likely to be willing to cede to the idea that women should take charge in post conflict societies. It is important that delegates research their own **country's history when it comes to female participation in government and their country's anti**-assault legislation before looking at any possible solutions.

Suggestions for Further Research

It is important that all delegates are familiar with UNSCR 1325, which can be accessed easily on the internet. Delegates should be confident with their own country's attitude to this legislation and any actions they have taken in response to it. Moreover, delegates should seek to research the history of gender-based violence of their country, as well as their country's intervention in other conflict areas and whether it has a track record of committing atrocities towards women. Much of this information is open-sourced and freely available online. While academic journal articles which summarise the detailed nature of the role violence plays will be illuminating, it is unlikely that delegates will need to consult print materials.

Closing Remarks

I hope you have enjoyed reading this background guide and I encourage you to continue your research from the suggestions that I have put forward. It has been a pleasure putting this together and I hope you will appreciate the topics just as much as I have in my research.

I look forward to seeing what you come up with at the Oxford Global MUN Conference this November.

Bibliography

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ⁱⁱⁱ BEIJING + 15. **No Equality Without Full Enjoyment of Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights** (PDF). *Center for Reproductive Rights*. Retrieved February 21, 2017.

^{iv} <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/03/1034241>.

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^{vi} <https://digileaders.com/5-barriers-women-face-stem/>.

^{vii} <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/11/un-peacekeeping-has-sexual-abuse-problem>.

^{viii} <https://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/research/ILJ/upload/Manjoo-McRaith-final.pdf>.

^{ix} <https://odihpn.org/magazine/gender-based-violence-a-confused-and-contested-term/>.

^x <https://www.unwomen.org/en/docs/2013/6/un-security-council-resolution-2106>.