

Forum: Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Question of: Measures to protect women in conflict zones.

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Introduction

Throughout history, women have been a prime target of discrimination. From the Afghanistan Taliban rule denying women education to the more recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States, history has demonstrated time and time again that women's rights are being put in the untrustworthy hands of patriarchal power. This is especially true in conflict zones. Be it the multitude of armed conflict that occurred in the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA) region, or in the more recent Ukraine war, young women have consistently been vulnerable to sexual violence, abuse, and torture under war conditions. English writer, Virginia Woolf, once famously said, "War is not women's history," yet they suffer the most from its consequences. As a matter of fact, over 80% of the world's refugees and internally displaced populations are women and children.

In order to cope with the denied access to proper healthcare services, loss of jobs, higher prevalence of poverty, and the destruction of homes and other assets, women are forced to flee their place of residence. However, women are generally disproportionately affected by the harsh impacts of displacement as they face the risk of gender-based violence. There are countless ways women can endure gender-based violence, with forced marriage and sexual abuse just being a couple. This leads to the essential reason as to why women require protection in times of armed conflict: the issue of gender discrimination. When states are already under a patriarchal power and have a history of misogynistic practices and beliefs, these would be further heightened in conflict.

To put this into perspective, Iraq can be used as an example. Prior to the Gulf War, Iraqi women generally had more rights than their counterparts in the Middle-East. However, the years of turmoil resulting from the Gulf War, the 2003 US Invasion, and the ISIS conflict caused an increase in widowed women who were required to take on the role as the breadwinner. However, the lack of education and opportunities in the labor market made it increasingly difficult for women to sustain their household. This, combined with patriarchal patterns of societal discrimination, made women more vulnerable and pushed them towards being sexual exploited. In addition, because gender inequality is the core cause of this issue, women are objectified to be 'tactics' or 'weapons' of war. The opposing group in a conflict would abuse

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women sexually, verbally, and physically in order to inflict political agendas and humiliate their enemy.¹ This tactic significantly increases the rates of sexual slavery and prostitution, as seen in the ISIS and Iraq conflict. The ISIS occupation initiated over six million people to lose their homes, and women were extremely vulnerable during this time as they were a primal target of sex trafficking. However, the unfortunate reality is that this is very common among most camps for displaced people around the world such as the Syrian and Yemini refugees.

Though it has been demonstrated that wars yield extremely negative effects for women, it has provided an opportunity to challenge traditional norms. Women were tasked with being the breadwinner and the head of house, something that would have been previously denied to them. This can encourage women to be empowered, and it has been evidenced that Iraqi women were able to live peacefully with women linked with ISIS. This initiated successful campaigning for the release of prisoners and the promotion of peace building programmes. This highlights that when women are given any opportunity, they can utilize it and provide successful results. Therefore, while only a few nations were briefly mentioned above, this issue has severe global impacts that should not be neglected. It is inarguable that the political participation of women is crucial in order to promote democracy and represent women's rights. However, women in conflict zones are isolated and marginalized, depriving them of their voices and being able to participate in decision-making processes. It is extremely important for women to have a seat on the table, as it allows for key gender-sensitive knowledge to be shared and developed, as well as promoting gender inclusivity in peace agreements.

The United Nations took this into account and put great priority on involving women in decision-making processes in the realms of peace-making, instigating the Security Council approval of Resolution 1325 in the year 2000. The approval of this resolution was a major milestone for women, as it encouraged political participation for women as well as was the root for eight further resolutions to be passed that suggested solutions that would aid in the protection of women in conflict zones. In addition to this, alleviating sexual violence in armed conflict was also recognized on the International Agenda through the Call to action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence. International organizations, NGOs, and donor countries amounting to 82 total have all joined this Call to Action initiative, and have highlighted the importance of this issue. While there has been a tremendous amount of attention on this

¹ "Trafficking in Persons in the Context of Armed Conflict - 2018 - World." ReliefWeb, January 7, 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/trafficking-persons-context-armed-conflict-2018>. "Human-Trafficking." United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime. Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/human-trafficking.html>.

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topic, there is still a substantial amount of financial and human resources needed to execute and implement solutions against this problem to its full potential. Though it is nearly impossible to achieve² justice for female victims of abuse in a war context, nonetheless, this initiative has promoted organizations to provide protection mechanisms for women.³

As part of the Committees Status of Women, it is paramount for delegates to understand that protecting women in conflict zones is not an easy problem to resolve. This agenda tackles just one of the incalculable problems that women around the world have to go through, and resolving it will require collaboration among all genders and global cooperation. Martti Ahtisaari, the former president of Finland accurately summed this when he said, "To protect women in times of war, we must first make sure women receive equal rights in times of peace".

Definition of Key Terms

Armed Conflict

An armed conflict is a situation of war or other conflicts in which state parties resort to utilizing armed force as a form of combat. Armed conflict can either be international or domestic, and are not inclusive of sporadic acts of violence or riots.

Conflict Zones

² "Armed Conflict and Women - 10 Years of Security Council Resolution 1325." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed July 14, 2022.
<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/armed-conflict-and-women-10-years-security-council-resolution-13>

³Napikoski, Linda. "What Is a Patriarchal Society and How Does It Relate to Feminism?" ThoughtCo. ThoughtCo, January 24, 2020.
<https://www.thoughtco.com/patriarchal-society-feminism-definition-3528978>.
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'Zones' directly denote an area with specific features and characteristics; therefore, in this case a conflict zone is a zone where armed conflict is occurring or likely to occur. Given missile attacks and other forms of destruction are present in these zones, all civilians are extremely endangered in these zones especially as their access to proper resources is jeopardized.

Patriarchal Society

The concept of a patriarchy is essentially the explanation of the power and privilege that men hold and is stagnant to most feminist theories. Therefore, a patriarchal society is the male-dominated power structure within an organized society. Women are generally oppressed in these societies as there are very apparent inequalities and distinct differences in power and unfortunately, it is present in a lot of conflict zones.

Forced Recruitment

This term is the process in which a colonial state forcibly recruits their citizens, often from rural areas, to fight in conflict. Rebel groups often target women to recruit, as the visible presence of females promote the group's visibility towards domestic and international groups.

Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

Internally displaced people are individuals or groups of people that have been forced or obliged to leave their place of residence as a result of armed conflict. Unlike a refugee, internally displaced people have not crossed the international border, and tend to become trapped in conflict zones which in turn, causes their basic rights to be compromised.

Gender-Based Violence

Along with the various other forms of violence that take place in conflict zones, gender-based violence is a term specific to sexual, physical, mental, and economic acts of harm towards women. In times of conflict and displacement, women are likely to be widowed and impoverished due to a lack of the male breadwinner, thus, the likelihood of gender-based violence increases drastically.

Human Trafficking

Through the use of deception, coercion, or fraud, human traffickers exploit victims to exploit them in either some type of labor or commercial sex act. Social and economic vulnerabilities that are amplified due to a combination of armed conflict and displacement initiate a higher risk of trafficking, especially to women.

Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation is an umbrella term that denotes attempted abuse of someone's vulnerability, in which the exploiter profits monetarily or socially from the victim through a variety of ways such as trafficking and prostitution.

Sexual Abuse

Unlike sexual exploitation, sexual abuse is a term used to define acts of sexual coercion, including sexual slavery, sexual assault, rape, and pornography. Form of sexual abuse and exploitation are common ways women are threatened in conflict zones.

Timeline of Key Events

December 16, 1977 - UN General Assembly adopted resolution (A/RES/32/136) "Elimination of Discrimination against Women"

Now widely considered "an international bill of rights for women," this resolution was the most progressive for its time in terms of tackling the issue of gender-based violence in conflict zones. Though somewhat broad, the resolution had a heavy emphasis on alleviating discrimination and encouraging equal treatment of everyone, regardless of gender.

April 7, 1994 - July 15, 1994 - Rwandan Genocide

As a result of an ethnic class division, the Rwandan Genocide was a a planned campaign of mass murder taking place in 1994. However, many women and girls in specific, were severely impacted through a multitude of insufferable ways. Up to a million women were raped, enslaved, and even sexually mutilated, marking this genocide as one of the worst for women in history.

March 23, 1991 - January 18, 2002 - Sierra Leone Civil War

Another example of armed conflict that instigated roughly 60,000 cases of war-related sexual violence against women was the Sierra Leone Civil War. To sum, the Sierra Leone Civil War was a revolt against the long lasting dictatorship. The rebel groups, primarily composed of men, coerced women to perform domestic chores while being tortured. However, this wasn't the only way women were exploited as they were also recruited to become combatants against their will.

September 4, 1995 - September 15, 1995 - Beijing Declaration of Platform and Action

Being the fourth World Conference on Women, 189 member-nations of the UN met to discuss the Beijing declaration, which essentially consisted of crucial measures and concerns with regards to advancing peace and equality for women. In addition, as a result of this declaration, women and armed

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conflict became one of the 12 critical areas of concern, emphasizing its importance and allowing for future discussion on the issue.

October 31, 2000 - UN Security Council approved resolution (S/RES/1325) on "Women, peace, and security"

This resolution serves as a major milestone for this topic, as it is the first Security Council resolution targeting women's peace and security. Along with increasing participation of women in decision making processes regarding conflict prevention and resolution, the resolution provides a comprehensive approach to protect women from violence in wars. It details special measures in order to achieve long-term results. The approval of this resolution has also initiated the approval of eight further resolutions in the realm of this agenda.

March 20, 2003 - May 1, 2003 - 2003 United States Invasion of Iraq

Although Iraq has a notorious history of gender inequality, women were especially patronized during the US Invasion of Iraq in 2003. Domestic abuse and prostitution rates had drastically gone up causing an increase in literacy. The death of many male soldiers also led women to be left widowed, making them far more vulnerable. In 2005, Islamist parties started to control Iraq, further promoting the patriarchal society into what it is currently.

October 9, 2012 - Special Court for Sierra Leone Addresses UN Security Council

On this date, the jurisprudence of the Special Court for Sierra Leone addressed the UN Security Council to discuss the progress and challenges in regards to ensuring justice for the civil war. As a result, the former Liberian President Charles Taylor was sentenced 50 years for facilitating murder, rape, and sexual slavery. This event is a landmark for women, as for the first time in the history of international courts, women held the highest-ranking positions, making it a major milestone for women's advancement in international justice.

February 6, 2014 - Iraq launches its National Action Plan

Resulting from the approval of Resolution 1325, Iraq was the first country to adopt a national action plan (NAP) in the MENA region (Middle-East and North Africa). Iraq's armed conflict history of the US invasion and Gulf war resulted in many tragedies, and thus, this plan was adopted to prioritize planning, programme development, and implementation to uplift the nation. There is a distinct focus on raising awareness on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda as well, making this a significant advancement for women in the MENA region.

January 25, 2016 - Occupied Palestinian Territory Publishes Action Plan

Following after Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian Territory is the second Arab state to develop an individual action plan. The key objectives of this plan were to protect women during the Israeli occupation as well as to promote female participation in international and local institutions. The influence⁴ women's organizations enabled a representative National Action Plan, quite similar to what was detailed in Iraq's NAP, to be achieved.

February 24, 2022 - Ongoing - Russian Invasion on Ukraine (Ukraine War)

Despite previous efforts in aiding women in conflict zones, the ongoing Ukraine war demonstrates that women are still put at risk in times of armed conflict. The disproportionate impact on women in the Ukraine war includes lack of proper accessibility to healthcare, safety, and food. Additionally, women are often excluded from decision-making processes regarding humanitarian aid and peace-making, despite these problems having direct impacts on them.

Position of Key Member Nations and Other Bodies

China

China played a critical role in partnering UN Women and governments through their establishment of The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which heavily contributed towards the progressment of this issue. The declaration addresses 12 key areas for women, including; education and training, violence, armed conflict, economy, power and decision making, human rights, media, and environment. China affirms the importance of cautioning limits to state sovereignty of freedom of action, as they wish to avoid protections weakening their sovereign power. Additionally, China requires assurance that any form of humanitarian assistance will not play a role in benefitting rebellions or other groups that China may potentially be fighting.

The European Union (EU)

⁴ "Protection of Civilians Mandate Peacekeeping." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/protection-of-civilians-mandate>. "Sierra Leone: The Women Who Bear the Scars of Sierra Leone's Civil War." PeaceWomen, February 3, 2015. <https://www.peacewomen.org/content/sierra-leone-women-who-bear-scars-sierra-leones-civil-war> "Government of Iraq Launches Its National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2014-2018) - Iraq." ReliefWeb, February 9, 2014. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/government-iraq-launches-its-national-action-plan-un-security-council-resolution-1325>.

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Unlike both China and Russia, the European Union, shortly known as the EU, leads the voice of favor to strengthen limits on the freedom of states to harm the global innocent and vulnerable demographics, particularly women and children. Taking a more peaceful approach, the member-states of the European Union place utmost priority on improving the situation for women and children in conflict zones. Though not being fully opposing on the use of force, the EU emphasizes that prosecutory measures must be taken for those that are responsible for imposing violence against women, while maintaining a respect towards the humanitarian goals.

The Russian Federation

Given Russia and China often ally in the United Nations Security Council, Russia's stance is similar to China's, but less compromising especially due to its ongoing involvement in the Syrian and Ukraine conflict. While Russia is not fully unwilling to admit international assistance, it is clear that the priority lies in protecting its military personnel and commanders from prosecution. Russia accepts international aid and other forms of humanitarian assistance to help women and children, however, denies it if it is at the expense of military and political objectives.

The United States of America (USA)

The United States has also demonstrated its strong support for the extension of international humanitarian principles, which is inclusive of the protections for women and children in times of armed conflict. However, the United States remains cautious, and has noted that they favor case-by-case or conflict-by-conflict responses, rather than instilling blanket measures. Similar to Russia, the US prioritizes protecting its military personnel from international prosecution.

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

Being the second largest grouping of states after the United Nations, the NAM is a forum of 120 countries that are not formally aligned with or against any major power. In this case, the African, Asian, and Latin American states of the NAM have a mutual consensus that the need for international prosecution for the vulnerable is extremely important. However, while the Latin American states are in high favor of maximizing the international law and humanitarianism force, the African and Asian member-states often wish to assure that protections will not weaken their sovereign power. To add, the member nations who are facing armed conflict require assurance that humanitarian assistance for women will not benefit the opposing group.

Sierra Leone

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With the tragic rates of gender-based violence that resulted from the Sierra Leone Civil War, the victims and the United Nations Committee Status of Women were committed to prosecuting those in charge of the unprecedented violence against women. The Special Court for Sierra Leone conference in 2012 sets a great example of how the reintegration of women into society can lead productive results,⁵ especially considering that it was an all women task force that investigated the war crimes from a gender equality perspective.

Ukraine

Ukraine's position must be taken into account more in depth, especially due to the current circumstances of the country. Being a conflict zone itself, the First Lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska, calls the global community out to think about and not forget the civilians of Ukraine with an emphasis on the women cohort. As demonstrated through the recent event in June in which women activists and leaders came together, Ukraine highlighted their stance that empowering women and utilizing humanitarian assistance are the essential ways to protect women in conflict.

Iraq

Iraq has an undoubtedly devastating history of war and violence, leading to incalculable massacres and civilians harmed. However, despite this, it was the first country in the MENA (Middle-East and North Africa) region to develop a National Action Plan, which was a significant push towards increasing women participation and protection. Roughly thirty organizations were established for the plan's implementation, as well as a Women for Peace group with 20 women from different political parties.

Working Group on Women, Peace And Security (WSP)

This non-governmental organization (NGO) is a vital one that has a focused goal of protecting women civilians in armed conflict. WSP has direct communications with many governments and the UN Security Council, where they request the Security Council to recognize how women are affected by conflict and to regulate international law in order to mandate protection in peacekeeping missions. Along with this, WSP advocates for psychosocial services to help female survivors of conflict.

⁵ "Protection of Civilians." NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/issue/protection-of-civilians/>.
"Women in Conflict Zones - DSPACE." Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620690/bp-women-in-conflict-zones-290319-en.pdf>.

Suggested Solutions

When considering solutions and methods of protection for women in conflict zones, it is vital to note the difficulties that come with attempting to tackle this problem. The core reason women are vulnerable in conflict zones is because of the deep-rooted misogynistic ideals and traditions that exist in said areas. However, eradicating an already existing patriarchal society is an irrational goal that would take a long time to achieve. Having said this, delegates should generate feasible solutions that have a prime emphasis on protection and rehabilitation, rather than focusing on how gender-based violence can be mitigated, as this would not only be implausible, but also lead to broad discussion that would distract from the specific issue at hand.

Prior to addressing solutions revolving around protection and rehabilitation, member-nations must prioritize holding meetings and conferences to discuss the problem at hand in order to formulate action plans. When attempting to resolve any issue that is occurring in a war or conflict situation, there is the presence of armed soldiers, militarization, missiles, and ⁶ multiple other forms of weaponry, and thus, there must be a proper action plan established in advance. To put this into perspective, following the approval of the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, Iraq adopted a National Action Plan, taking place from 2014-2018. This action plan was inclusive of the promotion of women's rights, protection and prevention, and also the encouragement of women participation in decision making processes, with its overall objective to build and sustain peace in Iraq. The essential factor that ultimately led to the success of this plan, however, was the discussion and preparation that took place, highlighting the importance of national cooperation. The Iraq National Action

⁶ al-Salhy, Suadad, and Isabel Coles. "Iraq Women Lament Costs of U.S. Invasion." Reuters. Thomson Reuters, November 12, 2013.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-arab-women-iraq-idUSBRE9AB00J20131112>. "Iraq National Action Plan - Peacemakers." Accessed July 14, 2022.

https://www.peacemakers.org/sites/default/files/final_draft_Iraq_nap_1325_eng.pdf.

"S/RES/1325. Security Council Resolution on Women and Peace and Security | UN Peacemaker." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/105>. "Timeline: 20 Years of Women, Peace and Security." Accessed July 14, 2022.

<https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/timeline/womenpeacesecurity/2020/en/index.html>.

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Plan sets a great example of how conferences and discussions within the United Nations Committee Status of Women can yield great outcomes.

In regard to the idea of solutions related to protection assistance from NGOs would be extremely beneficial. The United Nations is an organization that is open to collaborative efforts, and for this issue in particular, receiving help from alternate groups working towards the same goal will aid in accelerating the progress and reaching said goal in a more effective and efficient manner. As mentioned in the previous section, *the Working Group on Women, Peace And Security (WSP)* is an NGO that focuses on protecting women in armed conflict through collaborating with various governments as well as the UN Security Council. However, there are a multitude of other NGOs that actively work on the peace-keeping of women, and providing funding as well as having consistent communication with these organizations would help with formulating proper action plans that can be effectively carried out. Having active collaboration between member nations' governments and NGOs initiates the implementation of resolutions that have been adopted by the UN. As an example, 'WSP Fiji' was established through a working partnership between the Fiji Ministry of Women, NGOs, and other women groups to advance and progress the process of carrying out action plans. To add on, NGOs generally attract the general public more, which would not only help in increasing funding towards protection, but NGOs also generally provide an incentive to educate the public on this topic.

When considering the protection of women, a potential idea that is not too uncommon is to increase armed weaponry for women so that they can defend themselves. This, however, is strongly discouraged. The 16th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) by the United Nations is "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions", which is why it is important to dismiss the concept of increasing violence in situations of existing violence, as the outcome would be turmoil. As an alternative, a better and more peaceful approach to protecting women in conflict would be to increase active patrolling in conflict zones. The United Nations have a Protection of Civilians mandate (POC), in which peacekeeping missions are completely authorized to use all necessary means to prevent or respond to physical violence against civilians. Though the POC is somewhat controversial, the implementation of POC mandates is done through a variety of ways, including establishing POC sites where internally displaced people can stay, developing early warning

systems and other alert networks, and deploying additional military personnel to provide an environment beneficial for humanitarian assistance and monitor human rights violations. POC is a priority mandate and has a well-intentioned approach, however, it is only in accordance with resolutions passed by the Security Council. This essentially means that hosting conferences and regulating UN meetings to discuss new and ongoing conflict would allow the POC to act quicker, yielding more efficient results. There are still challenges that come with implementing POC mandates, though, which is that peacekeeping missions often protect civilians in difficult terrain and conditions with a lack of adequate resources. Therefore, regulating UN meetings would also be beneficial to discuss government funding, especially from more-economically developed countries (MEDC) to aid nations in conflict.

Along with protection of women, delegates should also create solutions that relate to the rehabilitation and reintegration of female victims. As mentioned earlier, women are vital to participate in economic and political discussion as women provide a different perspective that can help with sharing gender-sensitive knowledge, therefore benefiting society and yielding productive outcomes. However, in situations of conflict, women are generally denied their right to education and employment opportunities, making it difficult for them to find their voice under patriarchal power. Delegates should understand that protection of women in conflict zones should not just be limited to during the conflict, but also the post-conflict period. Post-conflict, a majority of women are left widowed, forcing them to take on the role of the 'breadwinner' and making them more vulnerable. Therefore, putting funding towards establishing only women educational camps would help in terms of reintegrating women back into society and increasing their chances to find employment opportunities. However, a very clear challenge that increases the difficulty of reintegration is the issue that a majority of cases of sexual violence go unreported and neglected. Partnering with NGOs and alternate organizations that primarily focus on helping female sexual violence victims and providing them a safe outlet to share their traumatic experiences from conflict would help these rates be visible and lead to the prosecution of groups involved. To put this into perspective, Sierra Leone sets a great example of how providing psychotherapy services and empowering women would help lead to prosecution and eventual, well-deserved, justice.

To conclude, with this conference's theme being "Bonds of Unity", it should be understood that especially in this day and age, social media has demonstrated its benefits in regards to being the voice for the ones who have been silenced. In any situation of injustice, the media will flood with videos, posts, comments, and hashtags demanding justice. In fact, in the majority of nations, over 60% of citizens use social media as a source of news, evidencing the significance of social media in spreading knowledge on global and political issues. In regards to women in conflict zones, women are oppressed and silenced by the corrupt and misogynistic men in power. These women are also often overlooked in the eyes of the media, disallowing the general public to educate themselves on the issue. Delegates should entwine their knowledge of this year's conference theme and the strength of social media in order to encourage forms of global awareness in their resolutions.

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⁷ "Conflict Zones Update." SKYbrary Aviation Safety, January 6, 2021.
<https://skybrary.aero/articles/conflict-zones-update#:~:text=Conflict%20Zones%20%E2%80%94%20Airspace%20over%20areas,which%20might%20endanger%20civil%20aircraft>.
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