



TOPIC A

Supporting Women in Conflict Zones



CSW
Commission on the Status of Women



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Introduction

Armed conflict disproportionately affects women and girls, exposing them to heightened risks of sexual violence, displacement, economic deprivation, and the collapse of basic services such as healthcare and education. In many conflict zones, women are not only victims but also key agents of resilience, leading households, supporting communities, and participating in informal peacebuilding processes. Despite this, their voices often remain excluded from formal decision-making forums. According to UN Women, over 70 percent of peace processes between 1992 and 2019 excluded women mediators, and only 13 percent of negotiators were women (UN Women, 2020).

The international community has increasingly recognized the need to integrate a gender-sensitive approach to conflict resolution and humanitarian aid. This includes ensuring the protection of women's rights under international humanitarian law, promoting women's participation in peacebuilding, and addressing the specific needs of women affected by war. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, established by Security Council Resolution 1325, remains a key framework guiding this commitment. However, persistent gaps in implementation, funding, and accountability mechanisms continue to hinder progress. The Commission on the Status of Women must consider strategies that strengthen international efforts to support women in conflict-affected areas while ensuring that local women's voices are central to the conversation.



Definition of Key Terms

- **Conflict Zone**

An area where armed violence is actively occurring or has recently occurred, often resulting in humanitarian crises, population displacement, and the breakdown of government infrastructure (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2022).

- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**

Harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, including sexual violence, trafficking, forced marriage, and psychological abuse, which increase during armed conflicts (UNHCR, 2021).



- **Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda**

A global policy framework, initiated by UNSC Resolution 1325, that calls for the increased participation of women in peace and security processes and the protection of women in conflict settings (UN Security Council, 2000).



- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

People who have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict or violence but remain within their country's borders (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2023).

- **Transitional Justice**

A set of judicial and non-judicial measures used to address legacies of human rights violations in post-conflict societies, such as criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations, and institutional reform (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2021).

Background information

Women in conflict zones face a unique and multifaceted set of challenges. They are often targeted by sexual and gender-based violence, used as tools of war to terrorize and destabilize communities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, thousands of women have suffered rape and mutilation as part of the ongoing conflict (UNFPA, 2020). Moreover, women and girls face disruptions to their education, increased rates of child marriage, and heightened vulnerability to human trafficking. Humanitarian responses often fail to adequately address these gender-specific vulnerabilities, either due to a lack of disaggregated data or insufficient consultation with local women's groups.

Despite these challenges, women frequently assume leadership roles within their communities. They serve as first responders, peacebuilders, and caretakers, yet their contributions are rarely acknowledged in formal peace processes. Furthermore, access to reproductive health services is severely limited in conflict settings, leading to increased maternal mortality rates and unsafe childbirths. According to the WHO, more than 60 percent of preventable maternal deaths occur in settings of conflict, displacement, and natural disaster (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

The persistence of these conditions demonstrates the need for gender-sensitive humanitarian aid and inclusive peacebuilding efforts. National governments, international organizations, and NGOs must collaborate to address these needs holistically. Special attention should be paid to the intersectional identities of women in conflict zones, as those from marginalized ethnic, religious, or LGBTQ+ communities may face even greater risks and barriers.

Major Parties Involved

- **Afghanistan**



Since the Taliban regained control in 2021, women's rights in Afghanistan have drastically deteriorated. The de facto authorities have banned girls from attending school beyond the sixth grade, restricted women's access to employment, and imposed limitations on their freedom of movement (Human Rights Watch, 2023). These actions violate international human rights law and have left Afghan women highly vulnerable to poverty, violence, and exclusion from public life.

- **South Sudan**



South Sudan remains one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman. Widespread sexual violence is used as a weapon of war by both government and opposition forces. According to the UN Mission in South Sudan, 81 percent of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in 2022 were women (UNMISS, 2023). Despite the presence of a peace agreement, implementation has been slow, and women continue to face insecurity and marginalization.

- **Syrian Arab Republic**



Over a decade of civil war in Syria has devastated healthcare and education systems and left women disproportionately affected by displacement and violence. Refugee women face heightened risks of trafficking and exploitation, particularly in informal camps (UN Women, 2022). Access to sexual and reproductive health services remains critically limited in many conflict-affected areas.

- **Colombia**



Although the 2016 peace accord between the government and the FARC included provisions for women's rights and gender equity, implementation has been uneven. Women human rights defenders, especially from Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, face threats and violence from remaining armed groups (Amnesty International, 2021). Nevertheless, Colombian women have been leaders in transitional justice and truth-telling efforts.

- **Ukraine**



The war in Ukraine has led to large-scale displacement, with women and girls making up the majority of refugees. Reports have documented sexual violence by occupying forces in affected regions (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2023). Although international responses have incorporated gender-specific support, gaps in protection and access to services persist.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, establishing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. This framework calls for the increased participation of women in all stages of conflict resolution and recovery, and for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence in conflict. As of 2023, 107 countries have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement these goals (UN Women, 2023). However, monitoring remains inconsistent, and many NAPs lack sufficient resources and accountability mechanisms to be fully effective (PeaceWomen, 2022).



To address these gaps, the Global Acceleration Instrument (GAI) was launched in 2016 to fund initiatives aligned with the WPS Agenda, particularly those led by civil society organizations in conflict-affected contexts (UN Women, 2021). Additionally, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) provides targeted support to grassroots organizations advancing women's roles in peacebuilding and crisis response. However, both mechanisms suffer from underfunding and short funding cycles. The Spotlight Initiative, a joint effort between the European Union and the United Nations, was launched in 2017 to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including in fragile and humanitarian settings. While these frameworks have brought visibility and momentum to the issue, the international community still faces challenges in translating commitments into sustained, tangible change.

Possible Solutions

One essential step forward is to increase long-term, flexible funding for women-led organizations operating in conflict zones. These grassroots actors often have the most direct impact on affected communities, yet they remain chronically underfunded. Ensuring that international donors prioritize local leadership and provide multi-year support would enhance program stability and effectiveness. In tandem, gender-sensitive humanitarian aid must be strengthened. Services such as reproductive healthcare, trauma counseling, and legal assistance must be integrated into all emergency responses, with special attention to the needs of women and girls.

It is also crucial to promote women's participation in peace processes. This involves more than setting quotas; it requires investment in education, leadership training, and political empowerment. International actors must also advocate for inclusive negotiations and hold parties accountable when women are excluded. Furthermore, accountability for sexual and gender-based violence in conflict must be reinforced through survivor-centered justice mechanisms and support for international and hybrid tribunals. Lastly, education and livelihood programs should be expanded for displaced women and girls, offering them tools to rebuild their lives and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. These measures can lay the foundation for a more equitable and durable peace.

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