

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence & International Law

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What is Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)?

CRSV refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict (UN S/2017/249).



Bosnia in the Early 1990s

An estimated **50,000** women were raped as part of a wider campaign of genocide, demonstrating that CRSV is not an inevitable side-effect of war as many assume, but can be used as a deliberate military tactic.

Opportunistic vs. Deliberate Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

- **Biology-Based Theories** – man's natural urges
- **Cultural-Pathology Theories** – societal structures and influences
- **Strategic Rape Theory** – sexual violence is used as a weapon of war; a military tactic



Underlying Causes: Gender Norms

- Belief that women are **bearers of biological and cultural reproduction** of the group
- Belief that women are **the bearers of the honour** of the community and its men
- View of women **as property/territory** belonging to the nation and its men



& International Law

A Critical Assessment of the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative

International Humanitarian Law

(governs participants actions during armed conflict)

1949 – Geneva Conventions

- Saw rape in war as a crime of honour and dignity, against the community; the cases of CRSV during WWII were largely ignored in court proceedings.

1990s – Ad Hoc Tribunals & the Int'l Criminal Court

- Saw the transition to viewing CRSV as a crime of violence, against an individual; an act for which people shall be prosecuted.

CRSV can now be considered as a war crime, a crime against humanity, and a tool of genocide.



The Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative

- Put forth by Foreign Secretary William Hague and UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie in May 2012.

"The aim of the PSVI is the eradication of rape as a weapon of war, through a global campaign to end impunity for perpetrators, to deter and prevent sexual violence, to support and recognise survivors, and to change global attitudes that fuel these crimes." (William Hague, 2014)



PSVI Accomplishments:

- Team of Experts
- Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
- International Protocol for Investigation and Documentation of Sexual Violence in Conflict
- G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict
- UN Security Council Resolution 2106
- Program for Global Action

PSVI Shortcomings:

- Celebrity Feminism / Hague's Vanity Project
 - Is it about the celebrity or the cause?
- Is it mostly talk (with relatively little action)
 - Is discourse about the subject enough?

What Next for the PSVI?

- Underlying arguments need questioning:
 - **'Ending impunity'** – is legalism the right path for prevention?
 - **'Weapon of war'** – are we silencing other types of sexual violence?
- Will it become institutionalised or be forgotten?

Picture References

1. politicaladvertising.co.uk/2009/02/27/amnesty-rape-is-cheaper-than-a-bullet/
2. www.gov.uk; Published 27th March 2014
3. blogs.fco.gov.uk/peterricketts/2013/09/20/join-the-uk-campaign-against-sexual-violence-in-conflict-its-timetoact/