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END SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT FROM RESOLUTION TO REALITY



Spring 2014

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The SDA recently welcomed

General Philip M. Breedlove
NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe
and *(right)*

General Jean-Paul Paloméros
NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation



They are the latest in the long line of distinguished leaders who have spoken at our debates



END SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT FROM RESOLUTION TO REALITY

Report of the Policy insight

co-organised by the Security & Defence Agenda,

the United Kingdom Joint Delegation to NATO and

the United Kingdom Representation to the EU

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Introduction

Sexual violence in war zones is a global crime affecting women, men and children in many parts of the world. A 2014 United Nations report points to recent cases of such violence in 21 countries worldwide.

Human Rights Watch observers suggest that between 200,000 and 500,000 women were raped in Rwanda during the genocide. UN agencies estimate that more than 60,000 women were raped during the civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002), more than 40,000 in Liberia (1989-2003), up to 60,000 in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995), and at least 200,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1998. In Eastern Bosnia there existed a systematic campaign of rape as a weapon of war. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) estimates put the number of women raped at up to 35,000, the majority of them Bosnian Muslims.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia found that key reasons behind the use of rape as a weapon of war included humiliation, ethnic cleansing, instillation of fear and search for information.

To end this scourge, “we need a set of common values to forge a unique and powerful diplomatic effort”, said **Vice Admiral Ian Corder**, UK Military Representative to NATO and the European Union, addressing a large audience from EU and national governments, NATO, NGOs, media and civil society. How can current and future initiatives effectively tackle the practical, political and social implications of sexual violence in conflict? The discussion, moderated by **Shada Islam**, Director of Policy at *Friends of Europe* and Strategic Advisor at the SDA, looked through the challenges to an effective collective response to the issue.

The fundamental challenge: Dealing with silence and impunity

“While I can’t speak on behalf of all the initiatives and events taking place this year and beyond, I believe all are contributing to raising the volume on ending sexual violence in conflicts”, said **Andrew Long**, Senior Policy Advisor for the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. The UK will host the first Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in London in June 10th to 13th 2014. The aim is to create a sense of irreversible movement towards ending the use of rape and sexual violence in conflict, to deliver a set of practical agreements and to identify specific actions by the international community in the four areas where greater progress is necessary. Commenting on the inadequate international response of the past twenty years, he stressed the need to prioritise sexual violence in conflict as a peace and security issue, end the culture of impunity and strengthen post-conflict transitional justice.

Meinie Nicolai, President of Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium, underlined that while some regard sexual violence merely as a war strategy, impunity and lack of law and order are also driving forces, both during conflicts and in post-conflict situations.



Vice Admiral Ian Corder , UK Military Representative to NATO and the European Union

Face to face with society: The taboo and stigma of sexual violence

“Despite its current international visibility, sexual violence has characterised conflicts also in the past”, said Shada Islam, inviting Meinie Nicolai to discuss strategies to support victims and facilitate their access to medical care.

“Using midwives and women-friendly medical environments to reach out to the victims is a way to facilitate the process.”



Meinie Nicolai, President of Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium

“It is very difficult to compare the current situation with the past, when the phenomenon was not measured”, said Nicolai. Yet, even today, the problem is under-reported due to fear and social stigma, which have dire psychological and social consequences. In addition, “sexual violence in many conflict zones is a medical emergency as victims are reluctant to come forward to seek help”, she observed. Syria, for example, is a context in which the taboo around sexual violence is particularly strong. “Using midwives and women-friendly medical environments to reach out to the victims is a way to facilitate the process”, she explained.

“Efforts to end sexual violence in conflict must connect prevention and response”, declared **Mari Skåre**, NATO Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security. Victims of sexual violence are also social actors. In that sense, “women’s empowerment is in itself a strategy to counter sexual violence in conflict, as well as helping men to understand their positive role in society”, she said. Skåre emphasised that removing the social stigma and giving victims access to legal, medical and moral support are as relevant as ensuring justice and providing an adequate legal framework. “Political leadership of both governments and international organisations is important, but in order to change people’s mindsets and attitudes, all actors in a society need to engage for gender equality”, affirmed Skåre.

“Efforts to end sexual violence in conflict must connect prevention and response.”

Mari Skåre, NATO Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security



The practical issue: Access to justice

As removing the social stigma attached to sexual violence seems a common goal, Shada Islam asked **Jean-Philippe Kot**, International and Transitional Justice Expert at *Avocats Sans Frontières* “is access to justice a way to tackle the problem and what are the obstacles?”

“Access to justice is a very sensitive process which does not necessarily remove the stigma, but can also lead to re-traumatisation”



Jean-Philippe Kot, International and Transitional Justice Expert at *Avocats Sans Frontières*

“Access to justice is a very sensitive process which does not necessarily remove the stigma, but can also lead to re-traumatisation” Kot explained. “Usually, the legal framework is not the main problem”, he added, pointing instead to inadequate victim support by civil society organisations, fear of ostracism and insecurity. On the other hand, “the justice system often lacks the necessary capacities and human resources, such as women judges and financial means”, leading to inefficiencies and lack of trust on the part of the victims.

Another fundamental problem is the dearth of reporting and medical evidence, which are critical to the judicial process. In that regard, raising awareness to collect evidence is a crucial but complicated and delicate process.

From theory to practice: Who does what to end sexual violence in conflict?

Given such fundamental problems, their local dimension and practical nature, how can policy makers sitting at NATO, in national governments, the UN or civil society organisations deal with the issue?

“It is the responsibility of national governments to address fundamental issues of impunity, law and order and the accountability of the justice system.”



Andrew Long, Senior Policy Advisor for the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Responding to the complexity of the problem must be a collective effort. “After extensive experience in the field, it is clear that we need an organised approach to sexual violence in conflict, based on international standards and a common protocol for documentation”, commented Alvilda Jablonko, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Programme Coordinator at No Peace without Justice.

“We still need to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon in order to tackle its multiple manifestations” said Marie Skåre. NATO has a policy on women, peace and security that includes a gender perspective in the planning

and execution of operations and reporting system. “The strengthening of our gender-related training, which includes a code of conduct for the armed forces, is also important to ensure the accountability of those involved in crisis management and peacekeeping” she concluded.

Each organisation and initiative should have a specific entry point depending on its mandate. For example, “the Foreign Ministry in London will work to improve the investigation practices and protect victims engaging in a judicial process, to avoid any further trauma and ensure some form of justice”. Yet, “it is the responsibility of national governments to address fundamental issues of impunity, law and order and the accountability of the justice system”, said Andrew Long.

Participants agreed that national governments are responsible for security and justice, however, foreign governments must be accountable for their role in the arms trade, which perpetuates a state of insecurity and violence, lack of law and order and thus the likelihood of sexual violence.

With the issue of sexual violence in conflict moving up the international community’s agenda, awareness of its forms and implications increases. Still, questions of impunity and accountability, training and documentation need further attention, while others such as sexual violence against men and boys remain unaddressed. The over-arching question is simple: as new occasions for debate arise, will international organisations, governments and the civil society take responsibility for actually moving from resolution to reality?



Shada Islam, Strategic Advisor at the Security & Defence Agenda



ANNEX I – Programme

END SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT: FROM RESOLUTION TO REALITY

Ending conflict-related sexual violence is of fundamental importance to international peace and security. Whilst it disproportionately affects women and girls, many men and boys are also victims. The overwhelming majority of this violence goes unpunished and becomes part of the cycle of violence that perpetuates conflict. It is also a major factor in refugee flows, and often condemns the victims to lives of poverty, slowing national economic development. This global scourge should be at the heart of how we view conflict prevention and foreign policy in the 21st century.

Challenges remain stronger than ever and there is still much to be done to tackle sexual violence in conflict. How can international organisations and governments better work together to improve international co-ordination? What are the measures required for improved monitoring, accountability, and enforcement to protect women and men from sexual violence? How to ensure sexual and gender based violence responses are fully integrated in all peace and security efforts? How can the international community better work with local actors to make them part and parcel of these efforts?

Welcoming remarks by **Vice Admiral Ian Corder**, UK Military Representative to NATO and the European Union

Jean-Philippe Kot

International and Transitional Justice Expert at Avocats Sans Frontières

Andrew Long

Senior Policy Advisor, Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, UK

Meinie Nicolai

President, Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium

Mari Skåre

Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, NATO

Moderated by **Shada Islam**, Strategic Advisor at the Security & Defence Agenda



ANNEX II – List of participants

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SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

The SDA is the only think-tank in Brussels focusing exclusively on defence and security issues. It ensures the voices of all stakeholders are heard by gathering representatives from NATO and the EU, national governments and parliaments, industry, academia, think-tanks, NGOs and the media. The SDA places emphasis on topical, lively and innovative debates and publications, giving all stakeholders an opportunity to voice their opinions.



Sexual violence in war zones is a global crime affecting women, men and children in many parts of the world. A recent United Nations report points to recent cases of such violence in 21 countries. As Zainab Bangura, the United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence, has underlined: "It doesn't matter whether she comes from Bosnia, she comes from Colombia or Syria or Central Africa, the pain that a woman feels who has been raped is the same."

Clearly, ending conflict-related sexual violence is of fundamental importance to international peace and security. This fact sheet produced by SDA and Friends of Europe highlights the extent of the problem worldwide. The fact sheet includes both an array of evidence as to why it matters, complex or comprehensive. But it should help promote understanding of a crime which is too often under-estimated and under-reported.



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