

## **Women in Conflict and Post Conflict Situations: Charting a Path for Equity**

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at the FIDA Africa Regional Congress 2010, on the 20<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2010 at the Shehu Musa Yar'adua Centre, Abuja, Nigeria on the theme: "African Women's Decade 2010-2020: Advancing Gender Equality".<sup>1</sup>

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### **Introduction**

I would like to start my discussion on women in conflict and post conflict situations with a few testimonies shared by survivors of the Odi conflict of 2000-2001 at CIRDDOC's 2001 tribunal on violence against women. The accounts are sordid. I reproduce the testimonies in the words of the victims recorded verbatim:

"My name is Caro Kagbara. I am a farmer and widow from Bayelsa State. One day, the officials of Shell Company who were accompanied by armed soldiers were all over my farmland destroying all the crops in their process of exploration. I did not challenge them, nor ask any questions. I simply went over to pick up whatever I could find of the crops. Just then two soldiers walked up to me and shot me in the hand without warning. I was thereafter taken to the hospital where I lay untreated for three weeks. I was sent back to the village in that condition. My husband's people arranged and took me to the University Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt where I was amputated. Two out of my seven children have since died as a result of my inability to properly cater for them. Nobody really cares about the entire situation".

"My name is Janet Yorana from Bayelsa State. In May, 1994, at about 1.00 a.m., I heard hard knocks on the door. Before I knew what was going on, some soldiers had already broken into our room. I stood stunned with my two children whom they violently pushed aside and snatched me. One of the soldiers bent me over and started raping me from behind. The other two soldiers took their own turns. I pleaded with them that I was pregnant and they shouted down on me. I bled all over as a result of their violent intercourse with me. (Sobs). They called me "stupid Ogoni woman", etc. I replied that I am Igbo. They now dragged me out to the encampment of the soldiers where it was confirmed that I am an Igbo woman. When they had had their fill, Col. Okotimo, the leader of the group, ordered them to send me to his car. There he ordered me to open my legs while he fingered my genital through and through and raped me. I was left bleeding profusely. Meanwhile, those two children of mine have not been seen since then. My husband rejected me as a result of the rape till date. During the rape, I lost the pregnancy". (Sobbed).

"My name is Mrs. Gbara. During the crises in Ogoniland, the head of the occupation army, Col. Okotimo led soldiers to our house and forcefully took me. As I screamed for rescue, my

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<sup>1</sup> A Lawyer and a Chief Magistrate (Rtd.). She is a past Secretary, Chairperson and Project Coordinator of FIDA Old Anambra state of Nigeria.

husband ran out and upon catching sight of him, the Colonel ordered his men to shoot my husband. The soldiers shot and killed him on the spot. My two sons in JS3 and SS3 ran out when they heard the gun shots and the soldiers shot and killed the two of them. They also burned down our house. While I was still crying, the soldiers dragged me to the Village Square and raped me there in turns unrestrained. I am today left without a husband, children, home and personal dignity. I am crying for justice. They took away the body of my husband and I appeal to this tribunal to tell them to return the body of my husband, rebuild my house and bring the culprit to book". (Wailing) (At this point, most people in the hall could no longer contain themselves. They broke down and wept in sympathy).

"My name is Abi Amao. I am from Bayelsa State. During the Odi crisis, everyone ran into the bush for safety. But after some period in the bush, our food supply ran out and it became imperative to get out to look for food, especially for the sake of the children. I was captured by some soldiers who first beat me up and then raped me – four of them in turns. I pleaded with them that I had a surgical operation, which was barely seven months old and they ignored me. When the fourth soldier was raping me, I managed to tell him that I am a wife of their fellow soldier. I quickly gave his particulars. The soldiers took me to Bori camp where my husband was invited to identify me. He came and disowned me for fear that he might be killed. The soldiers beat me up the more. They handcuffed me and put me in detention along with male detainees for four weeks. The male detainees there too tried to rape me, but for the intervention of the head detainee who ordered that I be left alone. My captors threatened to kill me.

Later, I saw a certain soldier from Borno State whom I knew several years ago in Lagos. He was shocked by the ordeals I went through and he influenced my release. However, I did sustain permanent damages from that mass rape. Today, I suffer from pile (haemorrhoids); and permanent pains inside my vulva; I cannot sit comfortably. My husband has refused to take me back. It is an NGO in Portharcourt Women's Aid Collective (WACOL) that is at present taking care of me".

"I am Rose Peter from Bayelsa State. During the Odi crisis, my children got hungry in the bush where we had gone to take refuge. I went into the village to see if I could lay my hands on some food. The soldiers saw and caught me. They rained abuses on me. Next, they ordered me to undress. When I undressed they beat me up. Then the first, second and third soldier raped me. The fourth one withdrew his penis from my vagina and inserted it into my mouth and ejaculated into it. Then, he ordered me to swallow the sperm or be killed. I swallowed the sperm. (Sobs). Already, I was bleeding from the rape. They went and burned down my home. I have been very sick from the experience. I have nothing left. WACOL is caring for me now".

The very agencies whose mandate is to protect and safeguard persons against assault and rape, during conflict turn out to be the worst dreaded. In times of crisis and emergency, some individuals in both the military and the Police have turned around to terrorise those whom they should protect.

My organisation, CIRDDOC sponsored these cases to be taken to the Human Rights Violations Commission, popularly called the Oputa Panel, (in deference to Justice Oputa, a former Supreme Court Judge), which was set up specifically, under the Tribunal of Inquiry Act, Cap 44, Laws of the Federation of Nigerian, 1990 to look into allegations of human rights abuses under past regimes in the country and recommend ways to avert a recurrence in the future.

But General Ibrahim Babangida, who ruled the country from August 27, 1985 to August 1993, went to court to challenge a summons served on him to appear before the Probe Panel. This was in connection with a petition filed by Chief Gani Fawehinmi (SAN) (now deceased) on behalf of the late journalist, Mr Dele Giwa, who was killed by a parcel bomb on October 19, 1986, during the military regime of Gen. Babangida.

The Appeal Court had declared as illegal, sections 5, 10, 11(1)(b), (4) and 12 of the enabling law which was derived from Cap 47 of the Tribunal of Inquiry Act 1966. The Court, to which a Federal High Court, Lagos had referred the clarification, held that the sections contravened sections 35 and 36 of the 1999 Constitution.

The Court also said that the invalidity of the sections, derived from the fact that they were made in excess of the legislative competence of the National Assembly. At the Supreme Court, Justice Samson Odemwingie Uwaifo, in his lead judgment, nullified the Oputa Panel's enabling law. The Supreme Court held that: "The 1999 Constitution made no provision for Tribunals of Inquiry unlike the 1963 Constitution in item 39 of the Executive List and item 25 of the Concurrent List."

At the Oputa Panel, the victims presented their cases and gave the names of the officers that violated them. It was speculated that the Panel indicted the culprits and made recommendations on resettling them but as is usual the report was never released for reasons stated above. We had expected that they would be given justice and be reinstated by the government.

### **Women in Conflict Situations:**

The traditional perception of women in conflict and post-conflict situations is as victims of war. However, the active role women play in such situations is slowly starting to be recognised.<sup>2</sup> Women are often portrayed as victims of conflict; and, of course in large part they are targeted for rape; they are the ones that become widows; and they suffer most from decay of social sectors. Yet women are also agents, active participants in war, directly or supporting rebels; taking on new economic roles, often as heads of household.

But women are largely neglected once peace occurs: they rarely participate in formal peace negotiations; they are too often ignored in post-conflict politics and economics. And potentially

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<sup>2</sup> Cammack D., *Promoting Gender Sensitive Operations*, WFP Nairobi, 2000.

they could greatly improve the peace process, the sustainability of peace and post-conflict society and make an important contribution to the economy.

**Women As victims in Conflict Situations:** this is what we most often hear about. Rape is a weapon of war. Women more often than men are subject to sexual assault. 94% of displaced households in Sierra Leone had been subject to sexual assault; and a quarter to half of women in Rwanda's genocide were raped. In addition, women often resort to prostitution to support their families. Women are abducted into the army itself, or as army 'wives' or comfort women as we saw in the case of the second world war. The incidence of HIV/AIDs is particularly high among female populations in conflict areas. Security agents on peace mission to mutinous areas have raped women – the case of women in Odi and Choba in Bayelsa Nigeria, is captured above. Security agents on peace mission brutalised women and infected some with HIV/AIDS. In Rwanda, ...close to 500,000 women and girls were raped during the genocide...WHO reports, "the HIV prevalence rate in rural areas increased from 1% before the start of the conflict in 1994 to 11% in 1997". In another survey carried out by the Rwandan Association for Genocide Widows (AVEGA), 67% of women who survived rape had HIV". In the recent conflict in Kenya, HIV+ women were unable to access life-saving ARV drugs because of displacement, those who were raped could not access the Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEPs) on time.

Women suffer loss of incomes, as men fight, and they frequently become widows – in countries like Angola, Mozambique. In Kosovo, widows accounted for as much as half of adult female population when conflict ended.

In the Umuleri/Aguleri conflict in 1995 and 1999, women, particularly those who were products of pre-clash inter-marriages were abducted during the crisis in the attempt to make them break their marriages. Those who were still resident with their spouses lived under threat and fear of being victims if anything happens. Such people were even made to swear and take traditional oaths. Hospitals and health facilities were destroyed during the crisis. People were dying in their droves because of lack of health care facilities. Not a single hospital or healthcare facility existed in Umuleri. The worst hit were the women who had to attend to antenatal and postnatal needs alongside medical needs of their children.

The conflict between the Tiv and Jukun, coexisting in Benue & Taraba states in 2001 exposed women to atrocities. Mrs Elisabeth Isaac, a mother of eight, lost two of her children in the crisis and her two hands chopped off from the wrist. Her account: "I was in the farm when I heard gunshots. I quickly strapped my baby to my back and started running home because my other children were at home. On my way home, some soldiers accosted me and demanded for money, I had no money on me so I offered taking them home where I could raise money. The soldiers followed me but on our way, we met another set of soldiers who insisted on having my both hands chopped off instead of wasting their time going home with me..."

Another eye witness account had it that a pregnant woman was disemboweled and her foetus carved out in the bush where they were hiding. The woman was left to die in pains. A 12 year old baby, Luke was shot, his account: “My mother had my kid brother who is 7 months old; they removed the child from her before killing my mother. My 25 year old brother was killed and burnt in front of me. That same day, my 90 years old uncle was shot dead in his house”.

**Women As participants in Conflict Situations:** Women were active female combatants in Algeria, El Salvador, Eritrea, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, South Africa, Sri Lanka. One survey of 55 countries found women as active in 38. Estimates suggest that they form one tenth to one third of fighting forces; they generally play bigger roles in supportive services (cooks, messengers etc.) than active fighting but they do fight too. In a research conducted in southeastern Nigeria by this writer<sup>3</sup>, for example, women in the Umuleri and Aguleri Women’s Development Associations donated money and food to support combatants, and some fought. Research in Kashmir showed that women have played a significant role in militant activities, contributing both materially and ideologically. It is widely perceived that the movement could not have been sustained without the participation of women. They helped armed separatists to escape during crackdowns. Besides carrying out tasks such as feeding combatants and providing shelters, women in Kashmir acted as couriers carrying messages, arms and ammunition under their veils and they also played an active role, planting bombs, for example. Female extremist groups in Kashmir such as Dukhtaran-i-Millat also played a crucial role in indoctrinating other women into the movement.

**Women in the war economy:** Women frequently take on new roles during war, as men join the fighting, leaving jobs unfilled and losses in family incomes, for which women have to substitute. In the formal sector, women often take on roles previously held by men – this was very marked in the two world wars in Europe. In developing countries, this happens too but it is more often a question of taking responsibility for family income, becoming head of household, taking up farming responsibilities, and new roles in the informal sector e.g. in Cambodia and Sudan, women-headed households increased by one third.

**Women in post-conflict situations:** Despite their active role in war, women are too often neglected in the post-conflict situation, in terms of peace negotiations; demobilisation programmes; and post-conflict reconstruction. Women are rarely included in decision-making on conflict prevention, resolution and management, or even in peace-building initiatives. Women’s voices go unheard during formal peace negotiations, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, the creation of new constitutions, elections, reconstruction, rehabilitation, and the establishment of judicial systems. This occurs even though the violence perpetuated against women is exacerbated during times of conflict, and they make up the majority of all victims.

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<sup>3</sup> Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria (Umuleri/Aguleri Communal Conflict) (OMCT) 2002.

Women and children are the most vulnerable and at the receiving end of most of the worst excesses and abuses in situations of conflicts.

The Mano River Women's peace Network (MARWOPNET) brought together women from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and they were important in peace-making, e.g. bringing the heads of state to the negotiating table in 2001. Our research in Nigeria shows that women played an active role developing coalitions across fighting groups in the Aguleri and Umuleri conflicts in Southeastern Nigeria; conflicts within the Igbo community; and in Kaduna.

But they are much less active in formal peace negotiations: despite progress, often resulting from pressure from active women's groups, in 2008, UNIFEM estimated that women account for less than 10% of members in formal peace negotiations and less than 2% of signatories to peace agreements. A study of the Congo, Sudan and Uganda concluded that recognising and supporting the role of women in preventing and mitigating conflict was in general a minor afterthought. In Southeastern Nigeria, women were neither represented nor consulted in peace negotiations.

DDR programmes tend to be heavily male, partly because they define 'combatant' narrowly, excluding any support roles; and also because women ex-combatants are regarded less as a threat to future security. Female soldiers in Sierra Leone and Eritrea, for example, were left destitute.

But many *political settlements* have used the post-conflict situation as an opportunity to incorporate women into political processes. Constitution making following conflict offers new opportunities. E.g. Rwanda constitution requires 30% minimum female representation in Parliament, and in 2003, women accounted for 49% of seats. Steps to advance position of women were also taken by Burundi, Mozambique, South Africa, Timor Leste.

It is in economic reconstruction, that women tend to be most neglected. There is heavy emphasis on macro-stabilisation and pro market reforms – and gender issues are ignored. DDR including employment schemes are largely directed towards men. There are problems for women in formal sector employment as men return from conflict; and pre-conflict gender attitudes often resume. In Eritrea, women who had been barefoot doctors, dentists, administrators, teachers during the conflict could often not take on these roles post-conflict. In other cases, however, women in post-conflict situations did find employment – e.g. textiles in Cambodia; tourism in Guatemala. There is often discrimination against women in post-conflict land settlement – e.g. Zimbabwe; El Salvador. Farming assistance often bypasses women in extension, credit etc. and training and retraining is biased towards men.

**What is needed:** Formal recognition of what is needed in terms of peace-making and political systems is well advanced with many UN resolutions. It is a question of better enforcement. But

recognition is much less in relation to economic opportunities: assets ownership; employment; skills; formal sector medium sized credit.

### **International Framework on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence**

All major UN bodies have taken action to address sexual violence related to conflict.

The following are key milestones in international human rights law, humanitarian and refugee law, including universal non-treaty standards specific to women:

#### **Fourth Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949)**

states: “Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honor, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any other form of indecent assault.”

**Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974)**, adopted by the General Assembly, was the first recognition within the UN system of the need to address the specific threats to women in armed conflict.

**Second Geneva Protocol (1977)**, rape was specifically mentioned along with “enforced prostitution and indecent assault” as prohibited acts.

**General Assembly Declaration on the elimination of violence against women (1993)** condemns all violence against women including sexual violence.

**1994, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR)** appointed a **Special Rapporteur** on violence against women, who seeks and receives information on violence against women, its causes and consequences and recommends measures, ways and means for its elimination.

**1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action following the Fourth World Conference on Women** recognised that violence against women including rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy, is an obstacle to equality, development and peace.

The **1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court** categorizes systematic rape as a war crime and a crime against humanity and, in certain circumstances, even as an act of genocide. In 1993 and 1994, rape and sexual violence were specifically codified for the first time as a recognisable and independent crime within the statutes of the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and for Rwanda (ICTR). These two historic international instruments are now the foundation upon which crimes of rape and sexual violence are punished.

In **2000**, the **Security Council** adopted landmark **resolution 1325**, the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council that specifically addresses the impact of war on women, and women’s contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

In **2002**, the **Secretary-General reported on the issue of women, peace and security** in a study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peacebuilding and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict resolution. The study includes recommendations for concrete action to ensure greater attention to gender perspectives in all these areas of work.

In **July 2005**, the Security Council made security for children a matter of international peace and security by adopting **resolution 1612**, which identifies six serious violations against the rights of young people living in conflict situations. Rape and other grave sexual abuse of children constitute important elements of this list. The emphasis of resolution 1612 is on monitoring, reporting and sanctioning of rights violators.

In **2006**, the Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly an **in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122/Add.1)** mandated by General Assembly resolution 58/185.

Responding to calls from women's groups, rape survivors and NGOs, UN entities united in **April 2007** to form the first system-wide group within the Organization **UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict**. So far, 12 UN entities are members. The initiative brings together experts on issues like peacekeeping, development, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, human rights, humanitarian relief and gender concerns to help stop rape and other sexual crimes in conflict-torn countries.

**Security Council resolution 1794** of December 2007 requests the UN peacekeeping mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) to pursue a strategy to prevent and respond to sexual violence.

In **February 2008** the **General Assembly** adopted **resolution 62/134** on "Eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in all their manifestations, including in conflict and related situations." This resolution urges all Member States to take special measures to eliminate rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict situations.

In **March 2008**, the Secretary-General launched a **multi-year global campaign to end violence against women**, including sexual violence in armed conflict. "Achieving this requires national authorities to take the lead in developing and carrying out a comprehensive strategy to address the causes, kinds and consequences of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict," he said.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Background note of Prepared by the Peace and Security Section, Department of Public Information, in consultation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

**Resolution 1325 (2000):** on Women, Peace and Security, urged all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate a gender perspective in all United Nations peace and security efforts. It also called on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict. Resolution 1325 played an invaluable part in raising understanding that sexual violence in conflict is not just a gender issue, but a security concern.

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) signifies a landmark in the recognition of women's contribution to the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and their specific needs and concerns in armed conflict and its aftermath. The resolution stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The Security Council expresses its willingness to incorporate the gender perspective in peacekeeping operations.

Women are major stakeholders in conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, disarmament and security sector reform, and post-conflict reconstruction. In many conflict and post-conflict situations, women advocate for initiating and catalysing formal peace processes, and for maintaining community support for them and their implementation. They build ties among opposing factions, increase inclusiveness and sustainability of peace processes, foster reconciliation and complement formal peacebuilding efforts to sustain the peace agreement, particularly at the grass-roots level.

**The United Nations Security Council resolution 1820 (2008):** addresses sexual violence as a threat to international peace and security and complements Resolution 1325. On 19 June 2008, the Security Council held an open debate on "Women, Peace and Security: Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict," and unanimously adopted the ground-breaking resolution 1820, which recognises that the use of sexual violence as a tactic of warfare is a matter of international peace and security. Resolution 1820 states that widespread and systematic sexual violence can exacerbate armed conflict, can pose a threat to the restoration of international peace and security and has an impact on durable peace, reconciliation and development.

Sexual violence not only causes grave physical, psychological and health problems for its victims, but also has direct social consequences for communities and entire societies.

Furthermore, despite increasing awareness in recent years of violence against women and children in armed conflict, the problem has become systematic and widespread in some situations, reaching appalling levels of brutality.

The resolution reaffirms the political commitment of the Security Council to protect women and girls from sexual violence in conflict by demanding the "immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians." It calls on all parties to

armed conflict to “immediately take appropriate measures to protect civilians, including women and girls, from all forms of sexual violence” and notes that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide. Resolution 1820 also affirms the Security Council’s intention to consider targeted sanctions against perpetrators.

Stressing that successfully combating this “silent war against women and girls” requires strong leadership, comprehensive strategies and the involvement of a wide range of actors, from the UN and national governments to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the victims themselves, the Secretary-General has emphasized some key implementation measures, including:

- intensifying and broadening awareness-raising and strengthening institutional capacities through pre-deployment and in-mission training for national military and police forces;
- close monitoring of the human rights situation in specific countries;
- bringing perpetrators of sexual violence to justice through prosecution.

Resolution 1820 urges Member States and the UN system to strengthen their efforts in developing effective mechanisms for providing protection against sexual violence, facilitating the equal and full participation of women at decision-making levels, and in capacity-building and training. On the country level, states will have to establish specific sanctions regimes and must consider imposing “targeted and graduated” measures against warring factions who commit rape and other forms of violence against women and girls. Member States are also urged to deploy female military personnel, including, where required, personnel with expertise in dealing with sexual violence.

Back home in Africa, **the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa** defends the right of women to a peaceful existence and the participation of women in the promotion and maintenance of peace.<sup>5</sup> State parties are to take appropriate measures to ensure the increased participation of women in the peace process through the promotion of a peace culture; protection of refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, and displaced persons; and reduced military expenditure in favour of spending on social development.

States Parties undertake to protect asylum seeking women, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, against all forms of violence, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation, and to ensure that such acts are considered war crimes, genocide and/or crimes against humanity and that their perpetrators are brought to justice before a competent criminal jurisdiction.<sup>6</sup> States Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure that no child, especially

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<sup>5</sup> Article 10.

<sup>6</sup> Article 11 : Protection of Women in Armed Conflicts

girls under 18 years of age, take a direct part in hostilities and that no child is recruited as a soldier.

The following facts,<sup>7</sup> drawn from current and recent armed conflicts worldwide, suggest that Resolution 1325 and other legally binding instruments intended to safeguard human rights in wartime and postwar situations are honored more in their breach than in their observance.

Minimum number of 42 female detainees raped at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison pre-2004 while being interrogated by male U.S. military personnel, many of them also having been videotaped or photographed naked - all in violation of the human right to security of the person and 1949 Geneva Convention No. 111 requiring the humane treatment of all prisoners of war, including the right of female prisoners to be "under the immediate supervision of women"<sup>8</sup>

Percentage of Iraqi girls who, as of late 2003, stopped attending school for fear of sexual violence and abduction, a reality directly implicating their right to education and having long-term effects upon the rights of women in Iraq generally.<sup>9</sup>

Number of Afghan women who, in September 2005, were forced to withdraw their candidacies for political office because of security concerns resulting from mounting insurgency since the fall of Afghanistan's Taliban government.<sup>10</sup> It happened again in the just concluded elections (2010).

Number of reported rapes (some of eight-year-old girls) during or immediately after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 — likely a minimum number, the stigma of sexual assault being so severe that about half of the 400 women and girls became victims of "honor killings" by family members claiming retribution for shame.<sup>11</sup>

Number of maternal deaths for every 100,000 births in war-torn southern Sudan (among the highest rates in the world), due partly to available health centers being unequipped for even the most basic health services and generally dominated by male workers who tend to discount women's needs and focus on treating male soldiers.<sup>12</sup>

Number of "lost boys" driven from their families and villages during the Sudanese civil war and resettled across the United States for security and education while at least 3,000 "lost girls" remain essentially forgotten, some taken into foster families, some indentured as household servants, some likely sold to sex-traffickers.<sup>13</sup>

Estimated number of girls participating in armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where, even with large numbers of female combatants, women often are unable to find

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<sup>7</sup> UICHR Human Rights Index # 17 — Women in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations; First published in [The Iowa Review](#) (Volume 36, Number 3) Winter 2006-2007.

<sup>8</sup> *The Guardian*, 2005; UNIFEM, 2006; Physicians for Human Rights, 2005; International Committee of the Red Cross, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2003; Refugees International, 2003; Save the Children, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, 2005; Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, 2005

<sup>11</sup> PeaceWomen, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2003; UNIFEM, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> UNIFEM, 2006; UNICEF, 2006; UNDP, 2005

<sup>13</sup> UNIFEM, 2006; *Lost Boys of Sudan*, 2006

health care and become victims of sexual violence, and thus are deprived of their human rights to health, life, and security of the person, prescribed in the 2003 African Union Protocol on Women's Rights in Africa.<sup>14</sup>

Estimated number of women widowed due to decades-long civil war in Sri Lanka, creating a new demographic of female-headed households serving as breadwinners and caretakers simultaneously, many of them struggling to survive while waiting for aid given traditionally to male-headed households.<sup>15</sup>

Minimum number of Lebanese displaced since the onset of the July 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, a reality that will likely halt women's development and progress while other national needs are prioritised.<sup>16</sup>

Number of people displaced in the Colombian civil war, among the largest of post-World War II displacements, i.e., 5% of the 40 million refugees worldwide, 80% of whom are women in refugee camps facing dangers often as fierce as war itself - as in Darfur where, in 2004, up to 16 women were each day raped en route to collect water.<sup>17</sup>

**Women should be involved in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Processes**— The importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, including in mediation and negotiation processes must be emphasised. The UN documents mentioned above call for increasing their participation in all aspects of peacekeeping; for their full involvement in the management of humanitarian assistance, including in decision-making; their effective participation, as well as the integration of gender perspectives in all reconstruction processes and in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes, including a special focus on the demobilisation of women and girl combatants and their reintegration into society.

The combined efforts of Member States, the United Nations system and civil society have contributed to women's increased participation in selected contexts. Despite these gains, women's effective and systematic representation in formal peace processes still remains weak owing in part to insufficient political will and resources. In most conflict and post-conflict societies, women remain excluded from conflict prevention and gender-based early-warning indicators are largely ignored. Greater women's participation in programming humanitarian assistance and their access to decision-making, capacity-building and employment would make humanitarian responses more effective.

While Member States and the United Nations are increasingly engaged in supporting gender equality in peace building and post-conflict reconstruction, a majority of their efforts, however,

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<sup>14</sup> UNIFEM, 2006; Amnesty International, 2005

<sup>15</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, 2005; UNIFEM, 2003

<sup>16</sup> BBC, 2006; PeaceWomen, 2000; ILO, 1997

<sup>17</sup> UNDP, 2005; Common Dreams, 2004

do not systematically include gender perspectives. Greater women's involvement and equal participation are needed for Member States to increase stability and trust in the rule of law and security sector, preconditions for sustainable peace and democracy.

While the traditional perception of women in crisis and post-conflict situations is that of victims of war, the active role women in fact play in such situations is being increasingly recognized. Arising opportunities must be seized not only to promote the social rehabilitation of a country, but to encourage and support new institutional structures, legislation and its enforcement for the protection of women's political, economic, social and cultural rights. The transitional recovery phase can thus prove to be a particularly critical period for positive transformation of gender relations, providing opportunities to increase women's skills and income-earning opportunities and their overall empowerment.

The price of war is commonly assumed to be paid primarily by men. Yet, as soldiers themselves, as victims of sexual violence, as refugees, and in other ways, women are also greatly harmed by armed conflict. Since peace in Africa is seen as equivalent to health and well-being, there is need for the introduction of welfare measures in various local African governments to benefit large families: housing, health care, means of transport and communication, loans and early child education. In this way, there is need to assess the opportunities for practices which go beyond the restitution of 'negative peace', that is, the mere absence of war, to promote 'positive peace, i.e. conditions and practices of political and social non-violence.

It is necessary to improve the position of deprived groups generally as well as of women if this problem is to be tackled. And this is essential for sustaining peace. In so far as women are active in supporting conflicts, it is not enough just to say that women should have a greater role, politically, and assume peace will result; it is also necessary to address the underlying grievances.