



EARLY-WARNING INDICATORS OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Matrix



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This system-wide reference tool aims to help field personnel to detect and anticipate spikes in conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). The indicators are structured around six pillars that highlight the various dimensions of the problem and the constituencies needed for action, namely: military/security; social/humanitarian; political/legal; economic; media-related and health.

Written in collaboration with:



N.B. This matrix was developed in 2011. Theoretical concepts and practical applications on CRSV prevention and response have evolved since. Indicators should thus be contextualised.

Purpose and Mandate

Sexual violence has long been difficult to detect, particularly when committed during or in the wake of war. This framework aims to help field personnel to not only **detect**, but also to **anticipate, spikes in conflict-related sexual violence**. Mass rape, like mass murder, does not happen without warning. Often it is planned, permitted and therefore **preventable**. In the case of incidents such as the June 2010 mass rapes in Walikale, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), timely information and action could have mitigated the atrocities. The UN Security Council, which has been actively seized of this issue since the adoption of resolution 1820 in 2008, has increasingly asked UN leadership: *Why did we not see this coming?* The development of the present matrix was thus called for by the **Secretary-General's Policy Committee** in December 2010 (Decision No. 2010/30) and in **Security Council resolution 1888** of 2009 (operative par. 24). It forms part of a broader project of encouraging proactive, and not only reactive, approaches to conflict-related sexual violence.

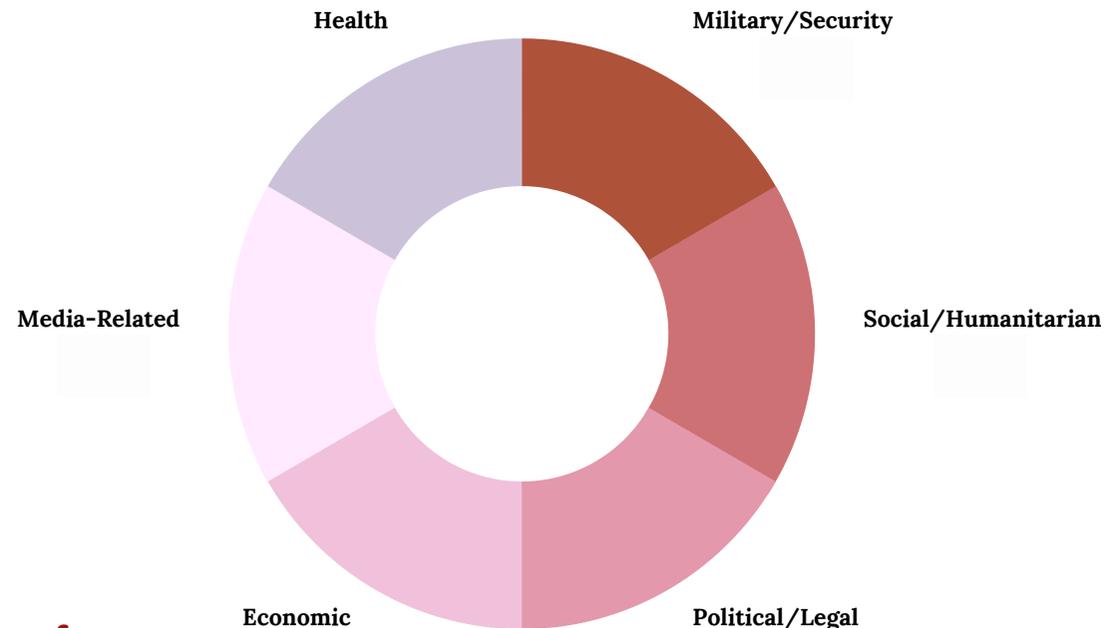
This matrix should be viewed as an **illustrative, system-wide reference document, planning tool** and **inventory** that can be adapted and integrated into existing and emerging early-warning and prevention systems at the **local, national and regional levels**, on a case-by-case basis. It can inform the tools used for planning, reporting, information collection and analysis within DPKO-led Peacekeeping Missions, DPA-led Special Political Missions, UN Country Teams, or at Headquarters-level. It is for various UN entities to determine how these indicators fit within broader risk assessment tools on the Protection of Civilians, human rights, humanitarian crises and related issues.

Overview and Use

The indicators listed here are **signals of potential, impending or ongoing sexual violence**. While early-warning frameworks generally focus on potential/imminent risk, indicators that sexual violence is ongoing or escalating have also been included, as such incidents often go undetected and unaddressed. The indicators should prompt an analysis of **changes in the operating environment**, for instance in the mobility patterns of women and girls (e.g., absence from schools or market-places), in the conduct of armed groups (e.g., pillage or proximity to civilian centers), or in terms of escalated political rhetoric (e.g., ethnic/gender-based propaganda). This analysis can inform 'hotspot mapping' of the location and timing of violations, as well as help to identify when seemingly isolated incidents may point to a larger pattern. The absence of the factors listed does not necessarily indicate the absence of sexual violence or a risk of sexual violence. Equally, the existence of these factors will not necessarily lead to sexual violence in all cases. The intention is for monitors/observers to take into account the **cumulative effect of relevant indicators in their overall reading of the environment**. Indeed, the signs identified here are mostly *qualitative* in nature, which implies that a lack of 'hard data' (i.e., *quantitative* data like numerical counts and statistics) should not preclude action. It is important that the indicators are read in conjunction with the relevant **contextual factors** provided in the matrix, to assess the level of risk in a specific setting.

In terms of end-users, the matrix is geared towards a **range of protection and assistance actors**, to help make the phenomenon of conflict-related sexual violence more visible. Key indicators can be extracted from this generic document to inform the development of country-specific frameworks that can serve to **enhance preparedness** to respond rapidly to observed risks and to improve how sexual violence is reflected in **contingency plans**. The information generated should be used to alert not only international actors, but also communities at risk. Early-warning of sexual violence should therefore be directed both *vertically* – getting the word up to higher powers so that pressure can be brought back down upon potential abusers to prevent atrocities, and *horizontally* – to people in the path of approaching violence.

The indicators are structured around six pillars that highlight the various dimensions of the problem and the constituencies needed for action, namely: **military/security; social/humanitarian; political/legal; economic; media-related** and **health**. **Indicative response options** have been included in light of the recurrent critique of early-warning systems that signs go unheeded. Some of the actions listed (such as gender-responsive camp design) are preventive measures to be undertaken regardless of whether early-warning signs are observed, in order to reduce vulnerability. For a more comprehensive catalog of protection and response options, see: [Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: An Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practice](#).



Methodology

UN Women conducted a desk review of **gender-sensitive early-warning indicators** and an analysis of salient features of past conflicts characterized by widespread or systematic sexual violence. This has helped to ensure the indicators are rooted in reality and exemplified by **concrete cases from past conflicts**. Based on this, a working group comprised of the Secretariat of UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action), UN Women and the Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict distilled the present matrix. As requested by the Secretary-General's Policy Committee, inter-agency consultations were held to finalize the matrix, conducted through the UN Action network, involving DPA, DPKO, OCHA, UNDP, OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF and the Office of the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide.

Definition

'**Conflict-related sexual violence**' refers to incidents or patterns of sexual violence, that is rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity, against **women, men, girls or boys**, including as a **tactic of war** or **tool of political intimidation**. Such incidents or patterns occur in conflict or post-conflict settings or other situations of concern (e.g., political strife). They also have a direct or indirect nexus with the conflict or political strife itself, i.e. a temporal, geographical and/or causal link. Broader acts of gender-based violence that are not related to a situation of conflict are generally beyond the scope of the present document. (See: [Analytical & Conceptual Framing of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#))

Legend

The indicators have been **weighted** according to three categories:

Potential Risk = Indicates a possible risk of sexual violence in the medium to long-term (*maintain close watching brief*).

Impending Risk = Indicates that sexual violence is imminent/likely to take place in the near future (*preventive measures needed*).

Ongoing Sexual Violence = Indicates that sexual violence is currently taking place/likely to escalate (*responsive action needed*).

Military/Security



The following signs are most likely to be seen in contexts where a culture of ill-discipline (lax command and control), self-entitlement and discrimination against women prevails on the part of the armed group. This is often compounded by a lack of training and professionalism, as well as the construction of identity in terms of violent, militarized masculinity. Another relevant background factor may be the rapid integration of former rebel fighters into the armed forces without vetting or systematic training; and where there is an absence of local authorities able to respond, or where the authorities are themselves involved in abuses (particularly where government forces enjoy statutory immunity).

Greater urgency should be accorded to these indicators where they occur against the backdrop of patterns of sexual abuse. If reports of sexual violence exhibit common features in terms of the profile of the perpetrator, the profile of the victims, the geographical and chronological distribution of cases and/or the modus operandi in the commission of crimes, this may evidence a consistent pattern of violations, e.g. an armed group may engage in patterns of looting, rape and destruction as part of a "scorched earth policy". In some contexts, like the DRC, women anticipate predatory attacks when there has been a delay in soldiers receiving their rations or salary. In other settings, like eastern Chad, an increase in sexual violence by the Chadian army has been observed when soldiers receive their salaries, as this is linked with members of the military entering towns/civilian areas and consuming alcohol. It is therefore particularly important that the indicators are seen in context.

While there will rarely be internal records authorizing rape, there may be official evidence in the case of systematic captivity or sexual enslavement, as well as utterances made by perpetrators that suggest the crimes are targeted, e.g. inflicted on civilians of a certain ethnic background while sparing those of another. The kind of weaponry rapists carry can give an indication of command and control or the level of organization behind an attack. For instance, if the group was heavily armed, and/or there appeared to be order among the assailants or a superior present who was issuing orders to others, that would tend to reflect a premeditated and purposeful campaign. While sexual violence is often linked with looting and pillage, it does not always coincide with mass killings or other forms of visible armed atrocity. For instance, in the case of the 2010 Walikale mass rapes, in which almost 400 Congolese civilians were raped during a 4-day period, not a single killing was confirmed by the UN fact-finding mission.

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions by Military/Security Actors

Potential Risk

- Parties/armed groups rely on conscription, abduction or other forms of **forced recruitment**, which increases likelihood of using sexual violence, particularly gang-rape, as a mechanism to enhance group bonding and cohesion (RUF in Sierra Leone, 1999).
- Armed groups reward or otherwise indoctrinate aggressive, hyper-masculine behavior and/or espouse a **military code or ideology that supports violence against women** of opposing communities to alter ethnic identity, humiliate, undermine enemy morale, fragment or eliminate future generations of the target group (e.g. belief that forced impregnation can alter ethnic balance, Former Yugoslavia, 1990s; *Interahamwe Ten Commandments*, Rwanda, 1994; belief that rape bestows powers upon fighters, Mai-Mai elements, E. DRC).
- Combatants operate under the **influence of alcohol and drugs** (Liberian civil war; E. DRC; E. Chad).
- Flare-up of remuneration **disputes and other frustrations in army**, when typically vented through drug and alcohol abuse and exactions against civilians (Fizi, E. DRC, 2011).
- Arms bearers undertake **house raids and searches**, particularly where women are alone in the home (Afghanistan; Iraq; Somalia).
- Placement of military bases/encampments in close **proximity** to schools, water-points, markets, IDP/refugee camps and other civilian centers, particularly those frequented by women and girls (E. DRC; South Sudan).
- **Retaliatory attacks** against the civilian population for perceived support of/collaboration with the "enemy" (Bushani, E. DRC, 2011).
- Exposure of forces to **pornography, particularly in military spaces** like barracks or vehicles (Serbian tanks, 1990s; Guinea-Conakry, 2009; pornographic depictions of Tutsi women and Belgian forces to set the stage for genocide in Rwanda).
- Individuals subjected to **security inspection** by members of the opposite sex at **military checkpoints** (Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory).

- Initiate **protection dialogue** with chain of command of party or armed group.
- Encourage adoption of a **code of conduct** to deter and discipline acts of sexual and other violence against civilians as part of professionalizing the armed and security forces.
- Include in **SITREPS**.
- Undertake "**hotspot mapping**" in consultation with women who are often the first to be aware of incidents or threats of sexual violence; **increase deployment** to identified "hotspots".
- Establish a **perpetrator profiling system** to monitor the conduct of relevant arms bearers/armed groups.
- Support government authorities to provide adequate **remuneration and accommodation for military** (e.g., logistical support to delivery of payments; support to construction of barracks, etc).

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions by Military/Security Actors

Impending Risk

- Widespread **looting** by armed forces/groups due to lack of supplies or other grievances (Fizi, DRC, 2011).
- Militias **ambushing vehicles** and attacking women/girl passengers (W. Côte d'Ivoire, 2011).
- Ex-militias, particularly from groups with a history of sexual violence, recently-integrated into armed forces **abscond/desert with their arms** (Fizi, DRC, 2011).
- Withdrawal/rotation of army, police or peacekeeping presence from an area, leaving a **security vacuum** (Walikale, DRC, 2011).
- **Infiltration** of refugee, displaced and/or transit camps by arms bearers (DRC; Sierra Leone; E. Chad).
- Heightened perception of physical insecurity among women and girls following the **reinsertion of ex-combatants into communities** without debrief or follow-up as part of DDR, or due to incomplete disarmament and demobilization (DRC; Liberia).
- Rest periods/intervals in hostilities during which armed actors **enter population centers**, particularly those devoid of men owing to the circumstances of conflict.
- Military acts of **revenge/victory**, particularly during the closing stages of a conflict when cities/villages are populated mainly by women and children (Sri Lanka, 2010; Berlin, Germany, end of WWII).
- Soldiers not **paid, provisioned and/or cantoned** in barracks, increasing the likelihood of preying upon civilians (DRC).
- **Equipping of forces** to perpetrate sexual violence (supplying condoms/Viagra, as alleged in Libya, 2011; mass supply of condoms to troops in occupied territory during WWII).
- Women in **detention** held under the immediate supervision of male, rather than female, guards and mixed with male inmates (mass rape, Goma prison, DRC, 2009).

- Elevate to **mission leadership** (SRSG/Force Commander).
- Alert military **observers** (UNMOs) and/or ceasefire monitors.
- Physically **evacuate** endangered civilians from "danger zone".
- Send **deterrent deployment**.
- Increase **presence** of uniformed peacekeepers in area.
- Establish **Community Alert Networks** (CANs) using mobile phones, sms, HF radio or satphones, as appropriate to local circumstances.
- Liaise with local authorities to **advocate for protection and deterrence**.
- Offer **advice to detaining authorities** on ways to bring prison facilities into alignment with international law/minimum standards (i.e., Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners).
- Work with Community Liaison Assistants/Interpreters (CLA/Is) to improve **direct communication with communities**, including with respect to **patrolling protocols** (e.g., frequency of patrols, night patrols, foot patrols, etc).
- Undertake firewood, market-route, water-route, field **patrols and escorts**.

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions by Military/Security Actors

Ongoing Sexual Violence

- Observable **signs of rampage**: burned homes, destroyed crops, looted villages, torn clothing, torn mattresses, displaced women/civilians (Walikale, DRC, 2010).
- Armed elements engage in violent **reprisals** against civilians in the wake of military operations (after Kimia II, DRC, 2009).
- **Police reports** of increased sexual violence (noting that increased reporting may signal increased confidence in the authorities/improved safety conditions).
- Military **defeat and retreat** through an area, increasing likelihood of rape and pillage as a form of "scorched earth" policy (movement of the Interahamwe from Rwanda to E. DRC, 1994).
- Reports of sexual violence/torture emerging from detention settings/internment/POW camps, often as part of **interrogation or punishment** (Iraq; Libya; Bosnia).
- Women/girls/boys **recruited and retained** within armed group by coercion (Angola; Uganda; Sierra Leone).
- Increased reports of a practice of **abducting** women/girls to serve as porters or possible "bush wives" (LRA, Central Africa).
- Attacks on villages in order to **replenish supplies**/on farmers en route to fields or women returning from market, coupled with abduction of civilians to carry the stolen goods (LRA, Orientale Province, DRC, 2011).
- Women/girls **fleeing** a village/area where armed elements are stationed (W. Côte d'Ivoire, 2011).

- Apply **political pressure** on perpetrators/abusive groups.
- Send **JPT/patrol** to area.
- Establish **TOBs/MOBs**.
- Help to **build local and national response capacity** (e.g., establish mechanisms for reporting) and to empower community-based capacity/"village vigilance committees" (e.g., engage with youth/women's groups, engage men as whistle-blowers, etc).
- Advocate for a stronger presence by the **national police** (where police are not themselves involved in sexual or other violence).
- Liaise with local authorities to **advocate for protection and accountability**.
- Advocate for the **release** of forcibly-recruited women/ girls/boys.

Social/ Humanitarian

Sexual violence serves to spread fear among women and girls, often restricting the way they lead their lives. There may be a need to ascertain whether the restricted mobility of women/girls is due to physical insecurity and fear of sexual violence, or whether it is due to other factors such as illness, poverty, an increased burden of care owing to conflict, etc. The point is to monitor demographic deviations from the norm that may be determinants or predictors of conflict-related sexual violence. In the case of an increase in female-headed households, an assessment should be made of whether this signifies sexual violence and the attendant stigma, or rather routine seasonal migration for employment by male community members, high mortality among male combatants, etc. This phenomenon may be particularly telling in a context like the DRC, where under ordinary circumstances the divorce or separation of spouses is rare. Contextual analysis is important: in one setting the absence of women/girls from public places, including their usual places of worship, may point to physical insecurity, while in another setting women/girls may flee to churches or mosques in search of sanctuary, including from the threat of sexual violence.

Other relevant social factors that tend to indicate that women may be at heightened risk of sexual violence are: the enforcement of strict dress codes for women/girls, a context of structural gender-based inequality, strict regulation of women/girls' social and public life, and a cultural devaluing of women (manifest in widespread intimate partner violence, economic dependence, FGM/C, girl marriage, a record of gender-based discrimination and tolerance of rights violations committed against women, etc). These may be particularly acute in contexts where ethnic and other social divisions are manipulated by those with military or political power, and in societies with a strong "honor-shame" culture.

Unequal gender hierarchies, social inequalities and oppression are often characteristics of societies that are prone to elevated levels of sexual violence. Abrupt changes in gender roles and relations in society owing to war may signal a trend towards increased violence against women and conflict-related sexual violence. In addition, forced displacement severs social, clan, community and family protective bonds, which can expose women and children to heightened risk of sexual violence.



UN Photo | Luke Powell

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions by Humanitarian Actors

Potential Risk

- **Demographic shifts**, such as an **increase in female-headed households**, due to the absence of men from communities, or to an increase in the number of women rejected by husbands and communities (E. DRC); increase in **war widows** (Sri Lanka); **sex-specific displacement**/refugee outflows (Former Yugoslavia, early 1990s).
- Pronounced group divisions and **segregation** along ethnic/sectarian lines; targeting women of reproductive age to dilute/extinguish ethnic identity (Former Yugoslavia, early 1990s).
- Rising **aggression in society** as it prepares for war, often manifest in rising levels of domestic and sexual violence and heightened expression of homophobia (Ethiopia in lead-up to conflict with Eritrea; E. DRC; Uganda).
- Tensions along border areas, resulting in sporadic, **ethnically-motivated attacks** against civilians (E. Myanmar since 1992; Kazakhstan, 2010).
- **Social dislocation** and the collapse of law and order are caused by natural disaster in a conflict-affected setting (Aceh after 2004 tsunami; Haiti 2010).
- Destruction of homes/shelters leading to a **lack of privacy**, including in terms of latrines/sanitation facilities, caused by military operations or by natural disaster in a conflict-affected setting (Haiti 2010).
- **Proliferation of small arms** in refugee/IDP camp settings (Darfur, Sudan).

- Mobilize local **faith-based networks** and other indigenous organizations, as well as religious, customary and traditional leaders to help prevent and deter violence.
- Locally **promote women's rights** and community reconciliation.
- Support efforts to provide **temporary shelters** that respect the right of women/girls to **privacy**.
- Take steps to **safeguard the civilian and humanitarian character** of refugee/IDP camps.

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions by Humanitarian Actors

Impending Risk

- Mass **displacement** due to insecurity or emergency, particularly where displaced women are compelled to pass *ad hoc* **checkpoints** controlled by arms bearers (Somalia-Kenya, 2011).
- Women forced to forage outside refugee/IDP camp for **firewood** to sell/use as fuel, and other daily needs such as water or grass/fodder, without protection from roving bandits and militias (often referred to in Darfur as "firewood rape").
- Heightened fear expressed by women/girls, including reports of **threats** of a sexual nature by arms bearers.
- Sudden increase in absence of women from market places, water-points and/or firewood collection sites (E. DRC; Darfur, Sudan) or other **changes to mobility patterns** such as self-imposed curfews and diminished social activity; increase in absence of children, particularly girls, from school (E. DRC; Liberia).

- Tailor protection activities to **women's mobility patterns**.
- Engage women **Community Liaison Assistant(s)/Interpreters (CLA/Is)**.
- Initiate **Community Alert Networks (CANs)** or equivalent.
- Support/mobilize **local early-warning networks** to alert threatened populations.
- **Advocate** with the authorities to strengthen protection and prevention.
- Establish **safe spaces in camps** for reporting and service delivery, ensuring they are inconspicuous in order to safeguard confidentiality; give women/girls items like flashlights and whistles; consult women in the design of camp layout and include them in daily management.

Ongoing Sexual Violence

- Increase in reports (anecdotal/informal, need not be UN-verified reports) of **gang-rape**, relative to single-perpetrator rape, and other forms of "**aggravated rape**" accompanied by torture/mutilation or committed in public, often in front of members of the victims' family and community, as well as an unusual variance in the age of victims (in police reports or victim testimonies recorded by human rights/humanitarian workers, E. DRC; in Sierra Leone 75% of reported wartime rapes were gang-rapes).
- **Disappearance** of girls reported by family or law enforcement officials en route to/from schools, in areas where arms bearers are present, often linked with abductions (E. DRC; Uganda and other LRA- affected areas).
- '**Pendulum displacement**' observed in conflict-affected settings, namely civilians (particularly women/girls) fleeing homes/villages at night due to fear of violence and returning by day (E. DRC).

- **Communicate information** to entities and actors in a position to respond (e.g., UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, OHCHR, ICRC, NGOs/implementing partners, mission/UNCT leadership).
- Recognize and **support** protection strategies employed by civilians/local civil society and **local coping mechanisms**, including those based on women's solidarity networks.
- **Advocate** with the authorities to strengthen protection, ensure accountability, provide assistance and combat social stigma.
- **Engage national human rights institutions** to monitor and follow up on cases.
- Undertake **humanitarian needs assessments** to inform service delivery to survivors.
- Support government-led (as appropriate) efforts to develop **referral systems** for survivors.



Political/Legal

These indicators often occur against the background of curtailed political space for women; patterns of gender-based electoral violence and intimidation; the existence of deep-seated legal inequities pertaining to the status and rights of women; and discrepancies between law and practice in terms of women's security. This often involves the systematic exclusion of women from positions of power. In some contexts, rape has been accompanied by statements accusing women of "seeking power" or participating in public demonstrations in defiance of social norms (e.g., in Guinea-Conakry, women raped by security forces on 28 September 2009 were told: "You were seeking power, this is what you'll get").

The risk of conflict-related sexual violence will be particularly acute in a context of collapsed rule of law, where there is a history of impunity for sexual violence and where the structures that exist to protect the population and deter sexual violence are held in abeyance. Impunity for/increased acceptance of sexual violence gives abusers a sense that, like the perpetrators of past crimes, they will go unpunished. In addition, cultural norms that tend to blame the victim, rather than the perpetrator, and treat sexual violence as a minor offence, may take precedence over written legislation. The absence of women from governance and justice institutions may also facilitate the perpetration of sexual violence with impunity. This is particularly true where women's rights are accorded low priority by political authorities, as indicated by the proportion of budgetary spending on these issues and the lack of attention to the rights of women/girls in national security policy.

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions by Political/Legal Actors

Potential Risk

- Violent, unconstitutional **change of power** (Fiji, 2009, rapes during constitutional crisis).
- Declaration of **emergency laws** or other basis for suspending women's/human rights.
- Absence of provisions on women's rights from ceasefire/peace agreement, resistance to women's participation in peace processes, lack of reference to punishment for sexual violence, or issuing of **amnesties** for sexual violence (may predict continuing high-levels of sexual violence post-conflict, as in Liberia).
- Political events like **elections or referenda** in societies where **traditional beliefs** imply that rape can impart political power (Liberia).
- Pre/post-**electoral violence** in a context where sexual violence has been used against civilians during previous conflict/unrest (Côte d'Ivoire, 2011).
- Creation of **new borders**/declarations of independence presaging mass population movement (returns from northern to southern Sudan, 2011).
- Credibly suspected **perpetrators remain at large**, are **released on parole** or **escape from prison** owing to weak judicial/corrections systems (DRC; Haiti, 2010; W. Côte d'Ivoire, 2011).

- **Public information campaigns** to promote women's rights and help to strengthen the capacity of the State and civil society in the area of promoting gender equality and women's rights.
- Appoint **female election monitors**.
- Support **women's participation in peace negotiations** and ensure use of UN Guidance for Mediators on Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Ceasefire and Peace Agreements.
- In any ceasefire/peace agreement brokered by the UN, **include sexual violence as a prohibited act** in the definition of ceasefire and in provisions for monitoring.
- Ensure there is **no amnesty** for crimes of an international character, such as sexual violence as a possible war crime, crime against humanity or constituent act of genocide.

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions by Political/Legal Actors

Impending Risk

- Permissive or encouraging **rhetoric** about rape, including justifications for sexual violence voiced by political leaders; commanders giving forces *carte blanche* through their own example and tolerance of abuses; a tone of impunity conveyed by political leaders dismissing or mocking claims of sexual violence in public/media statements.
- **Expulsions** of/attacks on organizations working on sexual violence; seizure of/interference with their data (Darfur, Sudan; Former Yugoslavia).

- Deploy **political interlocutor** or Special Envoy to engage with relevant authorities/parties (using the good offices of the Secretary-General).
- Send **fact-finding mission**.
- **Remind political/military leadership of their obligations** under IHL/ HRs and the adverse effects of losing the support of the civilian population and international community, and of disorder and sexually transmitted diseases among their force, as well as the detrimental effect of impunity on efforts to extend State authority and strengthen/resurrect the rule of law.
- Initiate **hotlines and websites** for women to report threats and to ensure the community is informed of risks.
- Initiate **protection dialogue** with relevant armed forces/groups (leverage threat of listing/sanctions pursuant to SCR 1960).
- Include in **reporting**.
- Work with peacekeepers and other relevant actors to provide a **security umbrella** for NGOs/organizations working on GBV, women's rights and related issues.

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions by Political/Legal Actors

Ongoing Sexual Violence

- **Women political candidates or participants** in an electoral process targeted for intimidation and sexual/physical violence, including threatening text messages and other forms of sexual harassment including sexually degrading insults (Kenya, 2008; Sierra Leone, 2011).
- Manifest intent to discourage or **punish women's political participation**, including through arrests of women active in protests or combat (forced virginity tests, Egypt, 2011) or through targeted violence against women involved in political protest (Guinea, 2009).
- Threats to/**reprisals against victims, witnesses and court staff** involved in prosecuting sexual violence offences, including destruction of evidence/hospital records, which indicates not only the obstruction of justice, but also that further acts of sexual violence may go undeterred (Former Yugoslavia; E. DRC).
- Female protestors/activists apprehended and taken to a **military prison** and subjected to insults such as being labeled "prostitutes" (Egypt, 2011).
- Reports of male detainees/political prisoners **forced to remain naked** for long periods while in their cells or during interrogation (Syria, 2011).

- Support establishment of a **rapid response mechanism** for gender-based electoral violence.
- Advocate for improved security around sexual violence trials and **enhanced protection** for victims and witnesses.
- Ensure detaining authorities are **trained** in human rights/IHL.

economic

[/,ekə'nämik, ēkə'nämik/] (adj.)

1. Relating to economics or the economy
2. Justified in terms of profitability

Several aspects of the political economy of conflict, such as changes in the supply and demand of weapons and the emergence of informal economies, e.g. illicit mining activities or the financing of armed groups through contraband, particularly along a contested border area, are often linked with forced prostitution, trafficking and sexual slavery. A lack of economic options and vocational training for ex-combatants returning to civilian communities may increase their propensity to prey upon and intimidate civilians.

Structural gender-based economic exclusion, discrimination and inequitable resource distribution may increase women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation, prostitution, trafficking and forced labor. The risk is heightened in contexts where sexual violence has previously been used as an instrument to assert economic or political control over the population.



Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions in regards to Economic Drivers

Potential Risk

- Drop in the **price of arms**/increased supply of small arms and light weapons, which increases capacity to commit sexual violence (Rwanda, 1994).
- **Inflation and food insecurity** presaging unrest and increasing economic burdens on women (Haiti).
- Increased reports of women's involvement in the **shadow war economy**, i.e., trafficking, prostitution (Sri Lanka, 2010: women forced into sex work due to lack of economic options linked with conflict and family separation).
- Movement of military forces towards a **mineral-rich area/mining community** (E. DRC).
- Women/girls in conflict-affected areas going out to farms, fields and markets for income-generation purposes during the **cultivation season** (Darfur, Sudan).

- Support **disarmament** efforts to remove weapons from communities; offer ex-combatants alternative vocational training.
- Monitor for cross-border human or arms **trafficking**.
- Facilitate tracing and family reunification.
- Establish/advocate for a **protection presence** in and around areas of women's economic activity (market-places, fields, etc).

Impending Risk

- Economic and power struggles within and between armed groups, including economic motivations for forcibly displacing civilian communities through campaigns of fear and intimidation, including sexual violence/terror: **disputes over natural resources** and **extortion**/forcible taxing of civilians (DRC); **land and resource disputes** linked with displacement and rape (Colombia).

- Provide security for government officials conducting **spot checks** of mining areas and other **due diligence** activities (e.g. physical tracing/ tracking the supply chain of "conflict minerals").
- Political efforts to **demilitarize mining sites**, coupled with enhanced police work and sanctions to discourage smuggling and operations to help sever links between mineral exploitation and armed groups (e.g., FARDC/MONUC operations "Umoja Wetu" and "Kimia I", DRC).

Ongoing Sexual Violence

- **Expulsions/detention** of economic migrants (including women) in border areas as a punitive action against those engaged in illegal mining activities and their families, to deter others and instil fear (Angola- DRC border).

- Agree on a **platform of commitments**/joint communiqué with the relevant national and regional authorities to ensure respect for human rights in the context of migration.
- Leverage threat of economic and military **sanctions**.
- Install **border monitors** to observe and report on abuses to relevant authorities, the UN country presence or protection and assistance NGOs, as appropriate.



MEDIA-RELATED

In a context where women are publicly portrayed as repositories of group honor and symbols of collective identity, targeting them can serve to attack and humiliate a group as a whole. Sexual violence may thus be used by armed groups as a form of "propaganda by deed". The media can play a critical role as a conduit for nationalist propaganda, in fuelling public anger and triggering violent action. The portrayal of women in the media can be both a form of incitement to sexual violence and an indication that sexual violence is accepted as part of the war effort.

Local journalists, including citizen journalists operating social media sites, can be important sources of early-warning of human rights abuses, including rape. These reports should be triangulated with other information sources to establish their reliability (and to ensure that stories of rape are not being used as propaganda for political gain). It should be noted that due to stigma, shame, fear of reprisals, and a sense of futility given the perceived impunity of perpetrators, very few victims report sexual violence or speak publicly about their assaults, particularly in contexts of active conflict. Therefore, the absence of reporting does not necessarily signify the absence of rape.

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions regarding Media Activities

Potential Risk

- Increased signs of media repression and **restrictions on freedom of expression**, including through the expulsion of international reporters, or journalists being prevented from interviewing women (Sudan).
- **Caricatures**/cartoons of women of a targeted ethnic, religious or political group (Rwanda, 1994, depicting Tutsi women as seductress spies).
- Media-driven campaigns of **hate speech** that denigrates women of a particular ethnic, racial, religious, national or political group (*Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines*, Rwanda, 1994).

- Close **media monitoring** for reports of sexual violence/coding local and international news stories.
- Work with the relevant authorities/ministries to ensure **respect for human rights** obligations, including **freedom of expression** with the exception of hate speech/propaganda.

Impending Risk

- Public **incitement** to sexual violence, including by reference to past violations against a community/group to justify future attacks, e.g. propaganda campaigns claiming the opposition is committing rape in order to justify further rapes as a form of retaliation.
- **Gender-based propaganda** printed in newspapers to incite rape (in Rwanda examples included: "You Tutsi women think you are too good for us"; "let us see what a Tutsi woman tastes like").
- **Misogynistic propaganda**, inflammatory rhetoric and hate speech (in 1990, a Rwandan newspaper published the "Ten Commandments", four of which portrayed Tutsi women as "sexual weapons" that would be used to destroy Hutu men).

- Initiate targeted **public information campaigns** to counter propaganda and incitement to violence.
- Help to **amplify the voices of women** in public debate.
- Take steps to **stop the broadcast of 'hate messages'** inciting people to violence.

Ongoing Sexual Violence

- Breaking **news coverage** of sexual violence in specifically designated locations (rape camps of Bosnia, 1992) or reports that otherwise suggest sexual violence is widespread or systematic.
- **Reports** of torn clothing and mattresses strewn along roads where armed groups have passed (Walikale, E. DRC, 2010).
- Threats or harassment of a sexual nature directed at local or international **reporters** covering the conflict or political unrest (Côte d'Ivoire, 2011; Egypt 2011), or of reporters covering issues related to rape (Sudan, 2011).

- Help to **build a safe environment for reporters**/media representatives to operate, including those covering sexual violence and other politically-charged issues.
- Deploy **Joint Investigation Team (JIT)** or **Joint Protection Team (JPT)** to areas where sexual violence has been reported by credible media and other sources.

HEALTH

An analysis of hospital records or equivalent can help monitors to assess whether these indicators exceed normal levels of reproductive health complications/STIs in the particular context. For example, the data provided by different hospitals in Kenya were used by the inquiry into post-election violence (including sexual violence) in 2008. Similarly, an analysis of prison records regarding STIs, HIV, pregnancy and other health complications among inmates can inform assessments of the prevalence of sexual violence in detention settings. Forced impregnation/forced maternity is particularly likely to be seen in patriarchal societies where children are considered to take the ethnicity of their father, especially in the context of genocide where rape is used to alter the ethnic balance.

It should be noted that only a small proportion of sexual violence victims – those with the most severe injuries or with the greatest access to facilities – will seek clinical care in conflict-affected settings (e.g., only 6% of rape victims during the Rwandan genocide sought medical treatment; just 7% of women subjected to sexual violence during the conflict in East Timor reported it). Moreover, there may be a significant delay in women coming forward or out of hiding to report (e.g., a delay of 23 days on average for rape cases reported to MONUSCO between June and September 2010).

Men are particularly unlikely to report sexual violence, especially in contexts of heightened homophobia and militarized masculinity linked with conflict, as well as due to social taboos, a lack of support networks, and the fact that male victims may find services closed to them.

Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Possible Preventive/Responsive Actions by the Health Sector

Potential Risk

- Increase in requests to consult with **women healthcare providers** (Afghanistan).
- Increase in requests for **HIV/STI testing** (Kenya, 2008; Guinea, 2009).
- Increase in **HIV/STIs** in conflict-affected areas.

- Reinforce/ensure presence of **female health workers** in hospitals and health clinics.
- Ensure periodic inventory of **PEP kits** in all "danger zones" for delivery within 72 hours.

Impending Risk

- Belief on the part of an armed group that rape (particularly of a young child or elderly woman) can **cure or protect against HIV** or increase potency and protection in combat (Mai-Mai, DRC; Kamajors, Sierra Leone).

- Dialogue and communications efforts to help **debunk myths** surrounding sexual violence and HIV.

Ongoing Sexual Violence

- Increase in women/girls **presenting at hospitals/health clinics**.
- Increase in women seeking **clandestine abortions** (Bosnia, early 1990s); spikes in sale of abortion-inducing drugs (Colombia); increase in cases of unwanted pregnancy and self-induced abortion.
- Increase in **female prison population** and in reports of women/girls subjected to torture and other forms of **ill-treatment**.
- Statements from doctors, war surgeons, gynecologists and/or medical NGOs that they are increasingly seeing **rape-related injuries** and/or being asked to perform traumatic fistula surgery (DRC) or hymen repair (Libya, 2011). Mental health indicators (trauma, suicidal tendencies) may also point to sexual violence (Afghanistan).
- Medical or **victim testimony** of compulsory birth-control/involuntary **sterilization practices** directed against targeted groups (Timorese women subjected to forced sterilization/Depo-Provera injections administered in girls' schools by the military, late 1980s).
- **Requests for HIV/STI testing** by men abducted by armed groups, e.g., for forced labor, upon their release (E. DRC).

- Ensure periodic **training of health workers** to interview and administer care to survivors of sexual violence.
- **Access** affected areas and communities, including through the use of military/peacekeeping assets, as needed.
- **Refer survivors** for appropriate medical and psychosocial services/liase with relevant organizations to ensure assistance and emergency treatment reaches survivors.

UN Action is a **network of 21 entities**, united in the goal to end sexual violence during and in the wake of armed conflict. Created following the Brussels Call to Action, it was endorsed by the Secretary-General's Policy Committee and by Security Council Resolution 1820. UN Action is the only system-wide initiative employing a **survivor-centred approach** to work as **One UN** to:



Prevent Conflict-Related Sexual Violence



Enhance accountability



Meet the needs of survivors of sexual violence



STOP RAPE NOW
UN ACTION AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT