



Forum: Social, Humanitarian, & Cultural Committee

Issue: Preventing conflict-related sexual violence as one of
history's greatest silences

Student Officer: Julian Faulk

Position: Chair

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I. Introduction

Jeanne Celestine Lakin was just a child when the horrors of the Rwandan Genocide tore her life apart. One day, she was surrounded by her loving family. The next, she was running for her life through the Rwandan swamps, the air thick with the stench of death. “We were hunted every minute, every second - people dying all around us. Rwanda looked like a big, open graveyard at one point,” she remembered.¹ The neighbors she once called family became her executioners. The people she trusted led her into the hands of killers. And when she searched for safety, she was met with unimaginable horror: sexual violence at the hands of the very man who had promised her protection.

Her story is not an anomaly, it is the reality of countless survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). During the Rwandan Genocide, an estimated 250,000 were subjected to sexual violence, including rape, mutilation, and sexual slavery.² Across conflicts, sexual violence is not just an act of cruelty, it is a weapon of war, used to break individuals, tear families apart, and destroy entire communities. From Rwanda to Bosnia, from Myanmar to Ukraine, women, children, and men have been subjected to the worst forms of abuse.³

We have the responsibility to confront this issue, ensuring that survivors receive justice and protection while preventing future atrocities. Despite previous solutions, CRSV remains one of the most pressing issues of our time. Survivors like Jeanne are left not only with scars but with the burden for justice alone.

II. Definition of Key Terms

¹ Brisbin, Shelly. “Rwandan Genocide Survivor Tells Of Her Escape, And Her Commitment To Help Other Orphans.” *Genocide Watch*, 22 January 2019, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2019/01/22/rwandan-genocide-survivor-tells-of-her-escape-and-her-commitment-to-help-other-orphans>.

² Habyarimana, Juvénal. “Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations.” *Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>.

³ Heinrich Böll Stiftung. “Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Meaningfully.” : Global Unit for Feminism and Gender Democracy of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, June 2024, https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2024-06/fact-sheet_addressing-conflict-related-sexual-violence-meaningfully.pdf.



A. Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, also known as CRSV, refers to acts of sexual violence perpetrated against women, children, or men during or after armed conflict, including rape, sexual slavery, and forced prostitution.⁴ These acts are used as a strategic weapon of war to destabilize communities and degrade populations.⁵ CRSV is often employed as a means of terrorizing civilian populations, with lasting physical and psychological consequences for survivors.⁶ The use of sexual violence in conflict extends beyond individual harm, destabilizing entire societies and hindering the recovery in post-conflict zones.⁷

B. Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender Based Violence refers to harmful acts directed towards an individual based on their gender, often resulting from deep-rooted social inequalities.⁸ This violence can include sexual, physical, mental, and economic abuse, with women and girls disproportionately affected, especially in conflict situations.⁹ CRSV is a direct manifestation of GBV, where sexual violence is used as a tool to exert power and control, and to maintain gender hierarchies.¹⁰ Addressing GBV is essential to understanding the broader patterns of discrimination that fuel sexual violence in conflict zones.

⁴ United Nations. "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence." *Report of the United Nations Secretary General*, United Nations, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/report/conflict-related-sexual-violence-report-of-the-united-nations-secretary-general/2019-SG-Report.pdf>.

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⁶ United Nations. "The Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence." United Nations, August 2020, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020.08-UN-CRSV-Handbook.pdf>.

⁷ Desai, Bharat H., and Balraj K. Sidhu. "Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones A Challenge for International Law?" *Sexual Violence Conflict*, United Nations, 18 February 2017, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/report/sexual-violence-in-conflict-zones-a-challenge-for-international-law/Sexual-Violence-in-Conflict-Zones-EPW.52.7.-2017.pdf>.

⁸ United Nations. "Gender-based violence." *UNHCR*, United Nations, <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/protection/gender-based-violence>.

⁹ United Nations. "Gender-based violence." *UNHCR*, United Nations, <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/protection/gender-based-violence>.

¹⁰ United Nations. "The Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence." United Nations, August 2020, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020.08-UN-CRSV-Handbook.pdf>.



C. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse involves the abuse of power by those in positions of authority to pressure vulnerable individuals into sexual acts, often in exchange for resources or protection.¹¹ In conflict zones, this involves peacekeepers or humanitarian workers who are entrusted with the responsibility to protect civilians. The misuse of this authority exacerbates the vulnerability of those already affected by the conflict. SEA highlights the failures of protective systems, making it an urgent issue in the context of humanitarian aid and peacekeeping operations.¹²

D. Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes (CAHWCA)

Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes are violations of international law, including murder, enslavement, and sexual violence during armed conflict.¹³ These crimes are defined by the Rome Statute and encompass a wide range of atrocities, including CRSV, which is recognized as a war crime.¹⁴

III. General Overview

For centuries, sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war in order to terrorize, control, and destroy communities. Despite its extensive use, it has been dismissed as a consequence of conflict rather than a military strategy.¹⁵ This silence has allowed perpetrators to act without consequence, while survivors experience shame and exclusion.

The use of CRSV is commonly known and well documented. During World War II,

¹¹ World Health Organization. "Prevent and Protect - What you need to know and do." *Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/ethics/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-pamphlet-en.pdf>.

¹² World Health Organization. "Prevent and Protect - What you need to know and do." *Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/ethics/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-pamphlet-en.pdf>.

¹³ Kadobnov, Yuri. "Armed Conflict." *Amnesty International*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/armed-conflict/>.

¹⁴ International Criminal Court. "Elements of Crimes." *International Criminal Court*, 2013, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Elements-of-Crimes.pdf>.

¹⁵ International Committee of The Red Cross. "Q&A: sexual violence in armed conflict | International Committee of the Red Cross." *ICRC*, International Committee of The Red Cross, 22 September 2016, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/sexual-violence-armed-conflict-questions-and-answers>.



an estimated 200,000, known as “comfort women” were sexually enslaved by the Imperial Japanese Army.¹⁶ In the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, approximately 250,000 to 500,000 women were raped as part of a strategy to exterminate the Tutsi population, many intentionally infected with HIV to destroy Tutsi bloodlines.¹⁷ Similarly, during the Bosnian War, thousands of women were detained in rape camps in their programme of ethnic cleansing.¹⁸ These are not isolated or exceptional events; they represent a long standing trend of using sexual violence as a weapon of mass destruction and psychological warfare.

Despite its prevalence, CRSV has been historically ignored in legal frameworks. *The Nuremberg and Tokyo Tribunals*, established after World War II, failed to prosecute and disregarded sexual crimes, reinforcing the culture of silence. Sexual violence was not officially acknowledged as a crime against humanity and tool of genocide until the late 20th century, with the *International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR)*.^{19,20} The Rome Statute of 1998 further established CRSV as a prosecutable war crime under the International Criminal Court (ICC).²¹

Putting an end to the silence surrounding CRSV requires acknowledging it not as incidental but as intentional violence. It demands international accountability, the dismantling of stigma, and an end to cultural and legal barriers that protect perpetrators. While international legal frameworks now exist, a majority of survivors don’t see justice. Peace agreements often exclude sexual violence from prosecutions in

¹⁶ McCarthy, Julie. “Philippine ‘Comfort Women’: Demanding Justice From Japan For WWII Sexual Slavery : Goats and Soda.” *NPR*, 4 December 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/12/04/940819094/photos-there-still-is-no-comfort-for-the-comfort-women-of-the-philippines>.

¹⁷ Habyarimana, Juvénal. “Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations.” *Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>.

¹⁸ Bell, Jared O. *The Bosnian War Crimes Justice Strategy a Decade Later*, Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher, 2018, https://books.google.de/books?id=MCC7DwAAQBAJ&q=Monography+about+Rape+and+Sexual+Violence+During+the+War+in+Bosnia+and+Herzegovina%E2%80%99&pg=PP3&redir_esc=y#v=snippet&q=Monography%20about%20Rape%20and%20Sexual%20Violence%20During%20the%20War%20in%20Bosni.

¹⁹ *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia* | United Nations
 International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, <https://www.icty.org/>.

²⁰ Home | United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, <https://unictr.irmct.org/>.

²¹ International Criminal Court. *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*. The Hague, International Criminal Court, 2021.



the name of reconciliation. Justice for survivors begins with breaking this historical silence by listening, believing, and acting. CRSV is not just a consequence of war. It is a weapon of war. Until it is recognized and prosecuted as such, its victims will continue to suffer in silence.

IV. Major Parties Involved

A. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, also known as the OSRSG-SVG, leads global efforts to address CRSV, working to raise awareness, and support survivors.²² Established by UN Security Council Resolution 1888 (2009), the office helps member states build legal frameworks to respond effectively to CRSV.²³

B. African Union (AU)

The African Union (AU) plays a crucial role in addressing CRSV within the continent, primarily in post-conflict member states.²⁴ It is famously known for the Maputo Protocol, which legally binds signatory states to protect rights for women and girls across Africa.²⁵ Despite frameworks proposed by the AU, many AU member states face limited capacity or political strength to enforce protections, particularly in ongoing conflicts.

C. Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The Democratic Republic of Congo has appropriately been named the

²² United Nations. "About the Office – United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict." *the United Nations*, 16 October 2024, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/about-us/about-the-office/>.

²³ United Nations. "About the Office – United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict." *the United Nations*, 16 October 2024, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/about-us/about-the-office/>.

²⁴ United Nations. "Framework of Cooperation Between The OSRSG-SVC and AUC." *Framework of Cooperation*, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, 31 January 2014, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/SIGNED-Framework-of-Cooperation-OSRSG-SVC-and-African-Union-Commission.pdf>.

²⁵ Kinyangi, James. "MAPUTO PROTOCOL ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA: COMMEMORATING 20 YEARS." *African Union*, 5 July 2023, <https://au.int/en/newsevents/20230705/maputo-protocol-20-years>.



“Rape Capital of the world” due to the widespread amounts of sexual violence inflicted by armed groups and state officials. The sexual violence against women “has been nothing less than brutal and destructive, physically, socially, and psychologically”.²⁶ The use of rape as a weapon of war has been nothing but unyielding epidemic.

D. All Survivors Project (ASP)

All Survivors Project (ASP) is a nonprofit organization (NPO) that focuses on supporting women and girls who have been victims of CRSV.²⁷ They seek to complement and reinforce existing work on CRSV against women and girls.

V. Timeline of Key Events

1949	The Geneva Conventions prohibit “outrages upon personal dignity”. ²⁸ This forms the foundation of international humanitarian law protections, including protections against sexual violence.
1998	<i>The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda</i> (ICTR) becomes the first court to recognize rape and sexual violence as an act of genocide and crime against humanity. ²⁹
1998	Creation of the Rome Statute which legally defines rape, sexual slavery, and more as both war crimes and crimes against humanity. ³⁰ This solidified CRSV in international criminal law.

²⁶ Brown, Carly. *Rape as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, 2012, <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r29631.pdf>.

²⁷ *All Survivors Project*, <https://allsurvivorsproject.org/>.

²⁸ International Humanitarian Law Databases. “Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field. Geneva, 12 August 1949.” IHL Database, 12 August 1949, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gci-1949/article-3/commentary/2016>.

²⁹ United Nations. “The ICTR in Brief | United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.” *International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda*, <https://unictr.irmct.org/en/tribunal>.

³⁰ International Criminal Court. *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*. The Hague, International Criminal Court, 2021.



2000	Establishment of the International Criminal Court. The Rome Statute enters into force, making rape, sexual slavery, and similar acts officially a war crime and crime against humanity under international law. ³¹
2008	The UN Security Council Resolution 1820 recognizes CRSV as a tactic of war rather than a consequence and calls for an end to CRSV. It states that sexual violence can constitute as a war crime, crime against humanity, or act of genocide. ³²
2009	The UN establishes an office to lead efforts in preventing and responding to CRSV, fostering international cooperation, and advocating for an end to CRSV. ³³

VI. Previous & Possible Solutions

A. Establishing Legal and Judicial Frameworks

One of the earliest and most significant steps in addressing CRSV as one of history's greatest silences was the development of legal frameworks that redefined CRSV as more than just a byproduct of war. Cases such as *Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu* by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) were the first to recognize rape and other forms of sexual violence as a tool of genocide. This groundbreaking case acknowledged that sexual violence could be used systematically to destroy entire communities. Similarly, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) prosecuted rape, sexual slavery, and forced prostitution as crimes against humanity and war crimes. These tribunals not only held individuals accountable but also changed the narrative around CRSV from private suffering to a matter of international concern. These precedents laid the foundation for the Rome Statute of 1998, which established the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Statute explicitly

³¹ International Criminal Court. "Elements of Crimes." *International Criminal Court*, 2013, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Elements-of-Crimes.pdf>.

³² United Nations. "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008)." *She Stands for Peace*, United Nations, 2008, <https://www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/content/united-nations-security-council-resolution-1820-2008-sres18202008>.

³³ United Nations. "About the Office – United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict." *the United Nations*, 16 October 2024, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/about-us/about-the-office/>.



includes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, and other forms of sexual violence as prosecutable crimes under international law.

However, in practice, legal enforcement has been inconsistent and slow. Many governments lack the political will, judicial resources, or institutional capacity to prosecute these crimes at the national level. Survivors often face intimidation, stigma, and inadequate legal protections, making it difficult to come forward. Moreover, peace agreements in post-conflict regions often overlook or deprioritize CRSV, allowing offenders to evade justice. Without survivor-centered legal mechanisms and stronger political commitment, international frameworks risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

B. Survivor-Centered Outreach Programs

While legal frameworks provide a structural foundation for justice, they are inadequate without addressing the trauma and social exclusion survivors face. Survivor-centered outreach programs are key to both healing individuals and communities. These programs aim to provide psychological support, medical care, and legal aid for survivors of CRSV.³⁴

Organizations such as the All Survivors Project or the Panzi Foundation aim to restore dignity to survivors by addressing their needs. These initiatives go beyond immediate medical treatment; they offer long-term psychological care, trauma counseling, access to education, and skills training to help survivors rebuild their lives.³⁵ The Panzi Foundation, founded by the Nobel Laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege in the DRC, provides care that recognizes survivors not just as victims, but as people with futures worth protecting and supporting.³⁶

³⁴ United Nations. "About the Office – United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict." *the United Nations*, 16 October 2024, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/about-us/about-the-office/>.

³⁵ *All Survivors Project*, <https://allsurvivorsproject.org/>.

³⁶ Panzi Foundation. *Panzi | Support Congo Women & Survivors of Sexual Violence*, <https://panzifoundation.org/>.



Survivor-centered outreach programs also work to change harmful social narratives.³⁷ In many communities, survivors face shame and blame. Outreach programs challenge these norms by educating local communities and promoting community based reintegration efforts. While legal frameworks work to prosecute offenders, outreach programs work with victims and communities to restore trust, identity, and community.

VII. Conclusion

Conflict-related sexual violence is not an inevitable byproduct of war, it is a deliberate, devastating weapon that leaves lasting scars on individuals and communities. While international frameworks and legal mechanisms have evolved to recognize and prosecute CRSV, justice remains elusive for many survivors. Real change requires more than laws; it demands survivor-centered approaches, political will, and global cooperation. The silence that once surrounded CRSV is beginning to break, but the path forward requires action, compassion, and accountability. We must commit not only to punishing perpetrators but also to restoring dignity and healing for those who have suffered.

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Bell, Jared O. *The Bosnian War Crimes Justice Strategy a Decade Later*, Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher, 2018, https://books.google.de/books?id=MCC7DwAAQBAJ&q=Monography+about+Rape+and+Sexual+Violence+During+the+War+in+Bosnia+and+Herzegovina%E2%80%99&pg=PP3&redir_esc=y#v=snippet&q=Monography%20about%20Rape%20and%20Sexual%20Violence%20During%20the%20War%20in%20Bosni.

³⁷ United Nations. "Community Care Part 3: Strengthening Community-based Care." *COMMUNITIES CARE: TRANSFORMING LIVES AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE*, UNICEF, 2014, <https://www.unicef.org/media/103856/file/Communities-Care-Part-3-Survivor-Centred-Response-Training-Guide.pdf>.



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