

War and Armed Conflicts: Impact on Women & Children

Tahmina Rashid

American war in the guise of locating weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, to "curtail terrorism" as projected by their policy makers, has diverse implications for regional and global socio-economic and political scenes. In this regard, the international print and electronic media portrayed various dimensions and desired images of the post-Saddam Iraq. The missing factor in this debate of international concerns and apprehensions is the implications of the war on the civilian population, particularly on women and children, who are unwillingly engaged in conflicts imposed by both local and global political actors. Prior to war on Iraq, American led allied forces were actively engaged in its "War on Terrorism" in Afghanistan, where a massive number of civilian casualties were simply described as "collateral damage" which in their perception was bound to happen in crisis situations. A similar situation in terms of human suffering was witnessed during the civil war in Bosnia, where the Muslim women were severely affected by the ongoing conflict. In order to understand the implications of any war and armed conflict on women and children we need to examine the dynamics of conflicts with special reference to the mentioned crises, in its entirety.

Women have tended to be classified within a single category "women and children", and as "vulnerable". Yet women are not necessarily vulnerable and certainly have

needs, experiences and roles in armed conflicts and wars that differ from those of children (although it must be stated that in many conflicts children are coerced into taking on adult roles). Women are actively engaged in many armed conflicts around the world and have played a part in wars throughout history. It was the Second World War that highlighted their role primarily in reservist or support units (including work in munitions factories) in the German and British forces and in the case of the Soviet Union, their direct participation in the fighting as members of all services and units "constituting 8% of the total armed forces".¹

The literature on the experience of war in fields such as politics, history, sociology and cultural studies, to say the very least, is prolific. It speaks of air raid campaigns, land warfare, technology, weapon systems, victories, losses, states, leaders, soldiers, killings, ideologies, alliances and peace treaties. Where women's experiences are written into accounts of war, it is usually in the form of state-sanctioned support base of soldiers: wives, mothers, mourners, non-combatants, civilians, factory workers, nurses, spies, entertainers and, occasionally, prostitutes or 'comfort women'.² Rarely are there discussions of the violence committed against women as a separate gender, be they civilians or soldiers. At some level it is recognized that this anomaly does exist but is not dwelled upon. Just as war attracts ferocious battles and bloodshed, it is similarly expected as General George S. Patton insisted, 'there would unquestionably be some raping'.³ Yet this 'naturalised inevitability' which initially at least, must exist somewhere in the public memory, has been written out of history.

Since then, women have assumed a much greater role and are more frequently joining the armed forces, voluntarily

and involuntarily, performing both support and combatant roles. To give a few examples, in the United States military, "overall, 14% of active duty personnel are women" and there were 40,000 women in the US forces who served in the 1990-1991 Gulf War.⁴ It is estimated that a fifth of the Eritrean armed forces are female and up to a third of the fighting forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) involved in the civil war in Sri Lanka are women. The role of the female "suicide bombers" of the LTTE has also underscored the horrifying extent to which women are prepared to take action in that ongoing conflict. Ironically, much of their "success" in hitting targets can be attributed to the fact that as women they can often get closer to their objective - possibly due to a perception that they are more vulnerable and therefore less likely to carry out such attacks. For many reasons, women are the preferred choice of secular groups when it comes to infiltration and strike missions. Generally women are viewed with less suspicion particularly in the conservative societies of the Middle East and South Asia where there is a hesitation to body search a woman, thus enabling them to wear a suicide device beneath her clothes and hence are as capable as men of perpetrating extreme violence.

Women also "actively" support their men folk in military operations - not by taking up arms but by providing them with the moral support needed to wage war. Data collected by ICRC's "People on War" survey exemplify this, as for example an elder and religious leader in Somalia said: "I believe that those civilians and fighters belong to one family group, once the civilians are going with the fighters doing things like cooking, treating them, and any other necessary thing... Whatever happens to the civilians is up to them. If they collaborate with the fighters, then what happens is up to them."⁵ And it is not just Somalis that responded in this way, as one young man in Abkhazia stated: "Somebody can hold a submachine gun and somebody only a ladle.

But it doesn't mean a cook is less responsible than a soldier."⁶ Despite these examples of voluntary and involuntary participation of women in armed conflict as combatants and in support roles, some countries and cultures refuse the participation of women in combat roles in the armed forces. The majority of women experience the effects of armed conflict as part of the civilian population.

The discussion surrounding the inclusion of women in the study of international politics, particularly in reflections of inter-State war as well as civil conflicts, promotes passive representation.⁷ Instead of dealing with the women and children as innocent victims of the firepower of the combats, they are presented as a separated passive category. The debate within the dominant tradition of international relations theory surrounding the inclusion of women does not provide appropriate answers to isolate the role of women and children in combat situations. State-sanctioned representations of non-combatant women reflect, rather than confront, traditional conceptualizations of women. The result has been the failure of mainstream approaches in international relations theory to identify the extreme insecurities of individual women whose experiences during inter-state war are not part of the state-sanctioned representations. The case of Bosnia was a turning point in international recognition of protection on women in conflict and in attempts by governments and aid-workers to solve the problems of women and girls.⁸

Human Rights groups and Women organizations highlighted this particular aspect of crimes against women. These days, with the introduction of Satellite communication system and cable T.V networks, wars are watched in the minutest details and thereby it becomes difficult to hide the dehumanization of women and children in particular. Human rights organizations have been at the forefront of struggles against oppression in theory as well

as practice to challenge existing assumptions and recognition of the emancipatory potential. The first is the recognition of a socially constructed and gendered reality that identifies vested interests in the subordination of women. Second and more recently, has been the acknowledgment of the multiple subjectivities of women and the dispelling of the 'essential woman' myth. These developments provide the space to begin to think about people and their different relationships in international arenas.

Currently, the consistency and extent to which women's bodies is the site, both metaphorically and literally, for inter and intra-state battles is not well documented in the literature on war. Despite the well-recited and centuries-old adage of 'rape, pillage and plunder', the actual rape and sexualized violence perpetrated against women during war has been silenced and hidden within mainstream international politics.⁹ However, cases of rape during conflict are extensive and multifarious. Human Rights Watch, an independent NGO, documented war rape and sexual violence in recent and ongoing conflicts in Sierra Leone, Chechnya, East Timor, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Angola, Cambodia, Haiti, Peru, Somalia, and Uganda and during the recent conflicts in Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo.¹⁰

In the circumstances of war, it is not just gender that targets women for sexual violence; it is the intersection of gender with the multiple and varied identities of religion, nationality and ethnicity that allows groups of women to be distinguished between 'our women' and 'their women'.¹¹ Thus, the subjugation, humiliation and degradation are not just an assault upon the woman and her body, but are also an assault upon her state/ culture/ religion/ ethnic group and the men who belong to her. At times, women are unable to isolate bodily rape from the rape of their land and

their culture. Conceptually, war rape should reflect these distinctions as well as other forms of sexual assault committed against women during conflicts and war.

The use of war rape by the Serbian government, military and militia groups as a strategy of ethnic cleansing and of genocide during its war in Bosnia brought the issue to the forefront of international condemnation.¹² As part of a strategy of ethnic cleansing, rape and the fear of rape facilitated the intentional and systematic, deliberate and brutal removal of one ethnic group (in this case Bosnian Muslims) from a land claimed by another (Bosnian Serbs).¹³ One Bosnian woman who was repeatedly raped by a Serb neighbour, even once in the presence of her son decided not to complain about it stating that, "He raped me, I told nobody because I did not want to cause panic. Not even to my husband. I am afraid of blood revenge that must not happen."¹⁴ Due to the societal attitudes towards rape victim, women tend to internalize sexual violence and suffer in silence.

In Bosnian war rape was used as a weapon to attack women's physical and emotional sense of security while simultaneously launching an assault, through women's bodies, upon the genealogy of security as constructed by the body politic.¹⁵ As a strategy of war, rape is one of the means by which the sanctioned and systematic pursuit of a political objective is undertaken. That political objective can range from terror and domination to genocide. The specific uses of rape in war are multifarious and involve combatant and non-combatant women alike. War rape, regardless of context, is both a form of torture and a tool of political terror. For example, rape and the threat of rape are used against women in order to gather information, to instill urgency into ransom-payers, as a means of punishment and as a tool of intimidation and humiliation to ensure civilian compliance. In October 1992, UN Secretary

General Boutros Boutros-Ghali appointed a Commission of Experts, headed by Professor Cherif Bassiouni, to investigate breaches of the Geneva Convention and international humanitarian law in Yugoslavia. The interim report claimed in reference to Bosnia that:

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that the practices of 'ethnic cleansing' were not coincidental, sporadic or carried out by disorganized groups or bands of civilians who could not be controlled by the Bosnian-Serb leadership. Indeed, the patterns of conduct, the manner in which these acts were carried out, the length of time over which they took place and the areas in which they occurred combine to reveal a purpose, systematicity and some planning and coordination from higher authorities.¹⁶

This was confirmed by documents ratified by members of the Serb military which claimed that:

Our analysis of the behaviour of the Muslim communities demonstrates that the morale, will, and bellicose nature of their groups can be undermined only if we aim our action at the point where the religious and social structure is most fragile. We refer to the women, especially adolescents, and to the children. Decisive intervention on these social figures would spread confusion among the communities, thus causing first of all fear and then panic, leading to a probable [Muslim] retreat from the territories involved in war activity.¹⁷

As members of the civilian population, women and girls like men and boys are subjected to innumerable acts of violence during situations of armed conflict. They often suffer the direct or indirect effects of the fighting, enduring indiscriminate bombing and attacks as well as a lack of food and other essentials needed for a healthy survival.¹⁸ Women invariably have to bear greater responsibility for their children and their elderly relatives and often the wider community when the men in the family leave to fight, detained, missing or dead, internally displaced or in exile. The very fact that many of the men folk are absent often heightens the insecurity and danger for the women and children left behind, and exacerbates the breakdown of the traditional support mechanisms upon which the community especially women have previously relied. Increased insecurity and fear of attack often compel women and children to flee, and it is common knowledge that women and children constitute the majority of the world's refugees.

In fact, this perceived protection that women will be safe is often not the reality. The ICRC assisted a large number of mostly elderly and frail women left behind in the former United Nations Protected Areas in Croatia (UNPA - frequently referred to as the "Krajinis"). They had been left by their fleeing family members to protect the property and/or could not or would not leave their homes. Even these elderly and often bedridden women were not free from harassment and attack. Owing to the proximity of the fighting or the presence of the armed forces, women invariably have to restrict their movements; this severely limits their access to supplies of water, food, and medical assistance and their ability to tend their animals and crops, to exchange news and information and to seek community or family support.

Women are all too often harassed, intimidated and attacked in their homes, while moving around their village

and its environs and when passing checkpoints. The lack of identity documents is a problem experienced by many women who have lost, were previously never issued with or did not feel the need to have documentation in their own right. Security and freedom of movement of women increases their risk of abuse, including sexual violence.

As previously stated women and children make up the majority of the world's refugees and displaced persons.¹⁹ Fleeing and living in displacement creates numerous problems for women around the world and ironically often exposes women to enormous risks. Women generally flee taking few possessions with them and many become separated from family members. Displacement may well force women to become reliant on support from the local population in the area to which they are displaced, or on assistance from international and non-governmental organizations. During these search women frequently risk attack and injury from fighting, mines and unexploded ordnance.

Civilian victims, mostly women and children, often outnumber casualties among combatants. In addition, women often become caregivers for injured combatants in a conflict unexpectedly have to be the sole manager of household, sole parent and caretaker of elderly relatives. While entire communities suffer, the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and gendered violence. Parties to conflict often rape women with impunity, sometimes using systematic rape as a tactic of war and terrorism. The impact of violence against women and violation of the human rights of women is experienced by women of all ages, who suffer displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration. They become victims

of acts of murder, terrorism, torture, involuntary disappearance, sexual slavery, rape, sexual abuse and forced pregnancy in situations of armed conflict, especially as a result of policies of ethnic cleansing and emerging forms of violence. This is compounded by the life-long social, economic and psychologically traumatic consequences of armed conflict.

Women and children constitute some 80 per cent of the world's millions of refugees and other displaced persons, including internally displaced persons.²⁰ They are threatened by loss of property, goods and services and deprivation of their right to return to their homes of origin as well as by violence and insecurity. Particular consideration needs to be given to sexual violence against uprooted women and girls, and the method employed to persecute the systematic campaigns of terror and intimidation and forcing members of a particular ethnic, cultural or religious group to flee their homes.

Women may also be forced to flee as a result of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons enumerated in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, including persecution through sexual violence or other gender-related persecution, and they continue to be vulnerable to violence and exploitation while in flight, in countries of asylum and resettlement and during and after repatriation. Women often experience difficulty in some countries of asylum in being recognized as refugees when the claim is based on such persecution.

Many women's non-governmental organizations have called for reductions in military expenditures world wide, as well as in international trade and trafficking and the proliferation of weapons. Those affected most negatively by conflict and excessive military spending are people living in poverty, who are deprived because of the lack of

investment in basic services- women suffer more due to their lower social status in many societies. Women living in poverty, particularly rural women, also suffer because of the use of arms that are particularly injurious or have indiscriminate effects. There are more than 100 million anti-personnel land mines scattered in 64 countries globally.²¹ The negative impact of the development of excessive military expenditures, the arms trade, and investment for arms production and acquisition need to be examined and addressed. At the same time, maintenance of national security and peace is an important factor for economic growth and development and the empowerment of women. During times of armed conflict and the collapse of communities, the role of women becomes crucial as they often work to preserve social order in the midst of armed and other conflicts. Women make an important but often unrecognized contribution as peace educators both in their families and in their societies.

Women display tremendous strength and resourcefulness in the coping mechanisms they adopt in trying to ensure their own as well as of their families survival. However, women in camps for displaced persons are frequently vulnerable, especially when they are the head of the household, widows, pregnant women, mothers with small children and elderly, for they have to shoulder all the daily responsibilities for survival which consume enormous amounts of time and energy. Furthermore, camp authorities and organizations in war torn traditional societies may overlook the needs of women, as they are not visible in the public sphere. Women with children are particularly concerned about their children's education and often have to find the means to pay for clothes and books, then must cope with increased workload if their children are at school. Women in detention often suffer from the lack of family visits and therefore do not have the support of their families. There are many reasons for this: the remoteness

of the place of detention, insecurity for visitors, relatives unwilling or unable (because they are displaced, have disappeared or are missing) to come, or lack of money to pay the travel costs. Furthermore, women detainees often have the added concern of their children's well-being, either because young children are detained with them or are being raised in difficult conditions or because they have been separated from their children and are uncertain as to who is raising them and how. Even where a family member has taken over responsibility for the children, these enforced separations have emotional and psychological implications for women forcing them into previously unaccustomed roles necessitating the development of new coping skills.²²

Children and War

Children affected by War comprise a large majority. In conflict zones like Palestine, Kashmir, Lebanon, Afghanistan and now Iraq, children experience trauma that is permanently imprinted on their persona.²³ The genesis of the decade's long Afghan conflict was in no small measure due to global apathy to the plight of Afghanistan. The women and children of Afghanistan, both among refugees and resident populations, have paid a disproportionate price for this conflict. The rates of malnutrition, disease, and death among Afghan children rank among the highest in the world. In addition to the many injuries due to landmines and artillery, over 80% of Afghan children interviewed reveal some psychological scars of war. Women and children must be the prime focus of attention in rebuilding Afghanistan, through sustained efforts at improving health, nutrition and education.²⁴

Most of the civilian and childhood casualties of the prolonged war in Afghanistan were the direct result of ballistic or landmine injuries. Compared with Bosnia,

Cambodia, and Mozambique, Afghanistan had the highest population based rates of landmine injuries and the highest mortality.²⁵ In a gruesome demonstration of specific targeting of children by the Soviets, many of the mines deployed were shaped as colourful toys or "butterflies." Despite attempts at de-mining, there were still close to 10-15 million mines in Afghanistan in 1993.²⁶ About 3-4% of the population of Afghanistan has been estimated to be disabled, of whom only a minority had access to treatment.²⁷

Over the last two decades more than five million Afghan refugees were living in Pakistan and Iran, either in refugee camps or urban squatter settlements. Although high childhood morbidity and mortality among refugee populations are well recognised, a 1993 survey of families in Kabul found that the daily mortality for children under 5 years of age was 260/100000 population.²⁸ This is plausible because, whereas refugees are a focus of international relief, resident populations are often left to fend for themselves.

The development assistance and support offered for economic and social recovery to Afghanistan were negligible, and what followed was a sorry tale of societal breakdown, lawlessness, and conflict. As always, the most vulnerable in Afghan society are bearing the brunt of the after effects of numerous conflicts. A survey of Afghan refugee women and children in Quetta found that over 80% of children were unregistered and child mortality was 31% (112/366 births). Of those who survived, 67% were severely malnourished, with malnutrition increasing with age.²⁹ These vulnerable populations remained entirely dependent on assistance from UN agencies and non-governmental organisations. Afghanistan illuminates another set of dilemmas often faced by aid-workers to function effectively within the boundaries set by the political

authorities while not perpetuating the abuses inherent in their rules.

The hardship after the American declaration of "War on Terrorism" brought disproportionate suffering and impoverishment to war widows and families in Afghanistan. Food shortages and malnutrition had their biggest impact on Afghan girl children. Less obvious are the psychological trauma and mental stress experienced by Afghan women and children and the impact of continued illegal conscription of child soldiers by all warring factions.³⁰ The situation is not confined to any one region and is going to spill over now from the situation in Iraq where the sufferings of people have already started emerging.

The impact of war on the psychological state of women and children will be part of their lives forever. Many have post-traumatic stress as a consequence of witnessing or experiencing parental loss in war. Political repression and State terror also have significant psychological sequelae. Recently, a study of internally displaced children from the war in Bosnia showed that 94% had features of post-traumatic stress.³¹ A landmark survey by UNICEF on the effect of war on children indicated that 41% had lost one or more parents because of the conflict and over half had witnessed torture or violent death. Over 90% of the children interviewed expressed the fear of dying in the conflict, while over 80% of the children interviewed felt they could not cope with events and that life was not worth living.³²

While such events can lead to considerable psychological trauma and distress, they may also inure a young mind to violence. Taliban and Northern Alliance soldiers were the product of the same cycle of violence and social upheaval experienced from early childhood. Ignorance, isolation and a daily ritual of violence greatly temper their vision of the world. This "lost generation" is likely to breed many more

unless action is taken to bring the cycle of violence to an end.

The role of United Nations in armed Conflicts and war

The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 1949, and the Additional Protocols of 1977 provide that women shall especially be protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution or any form of indecent assault. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, states that "violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law".³³ All violations of this kind, including in particular murder, rape, including systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy requires a particularly effective response.

Proposed strategic objectives to decrease the impact of armed conflicts

- 1- Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation
- 2- Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments
- 3- Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations
- 4- Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace

- 5- Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women
- 6- Provide assistance to the women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories³⁴

Suggestions to achieve these objectives

- a- Promotion of equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level, including in the United Nations Secretariat with due regard to equitable geographical distribution in accordance with Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations;
- b- Integration of a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts and foreign occupation and gender balance when nominating or promoting candidates for judicial and other positions in all relevant international bodies, such as the United Nations International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda and the International Court of Justice, as well as in other bodies related to the peaceful settlement of disputes;
- c- Ensure the appropriate training of prosecutors, judges and other officials in handling cases involving rape, forced pregnancy in situations of armed conflict, indecent assault and other forms of violence including terrorism.
- d- Exploration of ways to generate public and private financial resources, through the appropriate reduction of excessive military expenditures, trade in arms and investment for arms production and acquisition, taking

into consideration national security requirements, so as to permit the possible allocation of additional funds for social and economic development, in particular for the advancement of women;

- e- Investigation and punishment to the members of the police, security and armed forces who perpetrate acts of violence against women, violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict;
- f- Reaffirm that rape in the conduct of armed conflict constitutes a war crime and under certain circumstances it constitutes a crime against humanity and an act of genocide as defined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; take all measures required for the protection of women and children from such acts and strengthen mechanisms to investigate and punish all those responsible and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- g- Encourage the further development of peace research, involving the participation of women, to examine the impact of armed conflict on women and children and the nature and contribution of women's participation in national, regional and international peace movements; engage in research and identify innovative mechanisms for containing violence and for conflict resolution for public dissemination and for use by women and men;
- h- Development and dissemination of research on the physical, psychological, economic and social effects of armed conflicts on women, particularly young women and girls, with a view to developing policies and programmes to address the consequences of conflicts;

- i- Take steps to ensure that women are fully involved in the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all short-term and long-term projects and programmes providing assistance to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women, including the management of refugee camps and resources; ensure that refugee and displaced women and girls have direct access to the services provided;
- j- Take steps to protect the safety and physical integrity of refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women during their displacement and upon their return to their communities of origin, including programmes of rehabilitation; take effective measures to protect from violence women who are refugees or displaced; hold an impartial and thorough investigation of any such violations and bring those responsible to justice;
- k- Take measures, at the national level with international cooperation, as appropriate, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, to find lasting solutions to questions related to internally displaced women, including their right to voluntary and safe return to their home of origin;
- l- Ensure that the international community and its international organizations provide financial and other resources for emergency relief and other longer-term assistance that takes into account the specific needs, resources and potentials of refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women; in the provision of protection and assistance, take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in order to ensure equal access to appropriate

and adequate food, water and shelter, education, and social and health services, including reproductive health care and maternity care and services to combat tropical diseases;

- m- Apply international norms to ensure equal access and equal treatment of women and men in refugee determination procedures and the granting of asylum, including full respect and strict observation of the principle of non-refoulement through, inter alia, bringing national immigration regulations into conformity with relevant international instruments, and consider recognizing as refugees those women whose claim to refugee status is based upon the well-founded fear of persecution for reasons enumerated in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, including persecution through sexual violence or other gender-related persecution, and provide access to specially trained officers, including female officers, to interview women regarding sensitive or painful experiences, such as sexual assault;
- n- Ensure that the human rights of refugee and displaced women are protected and that refugee and displaced women are made aware of these rights; ensure that the vital importance of family reunification is recognized;
- o- Provide, as appropriate, women who have been determined refugees with access to vocational/professional training programmes, including language training, small-scale enterprise development training and planning and counselling on all forms of violence against women, which should include rehabilitation programmes for victims of torture and trauma; Governments and other donors should contribute adequately to assistance programmes for refugee women, other displaced women in need of

international protection and internally displaced women, taking into account in particular the effects on the host countries of the increasing requirements of large refugee populations and the need to widen the donor base and to achieve greater burden-sharing;

- p- Develop awareness of the human rights of women and provide, as appropriate, human rights education and training to military and police personnel operating in areas of armed conflict and areas where there are refugees.
- q- Disseminate and implement the UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women and the UNHCR Guidelines on Evaluation and Care of Victims of Trauma and Violence, or provide similar guidance, in close cooperation with refugee women and in all sectors of refugee programmes.³⁵

Conclusion

Today more than ever, States and parties to an armed conflict must do their utmost to uphold respect for the safety and dignity of women in wartime. Women themselves must be more closely involved in all the measures taken on their behalf. Every State bound by the treaties of international humanitarian law has the duty to promote the rules protecting women from any form of violence in war and should crimes occur, the perpetrators should be brought to speedy justice. If women have to bear so many of the tragic effects of armed conflict, it is not primarily because of any shortcomings in the rules protecting them, but because these rules are all too often not observed. The general and specific protection to which women are entitled must become a reality. Constant efforts must be made to promote knowledge of and compliance

with the obligations of international humanitarian law by as wide an audience as possible and using all available means. The responsibility for improving the plight of women in times of war must be shared by everyone.

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