

CONCEPT PAPER:

ENDING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES

– an international conference hosted by Norway, Iraq, Somalia, United Arab Emirates, UN OCHA, UNFPA and ICRC¹

OSLO, NORWAY, 23 - 24 MAY

Context

Humanitarian crises trigger and exacerbate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including rape, sexual slavery, trafficking, forced/early marriage and intimate partner violence. Pre-existing gender inequalities are worsened when protection mechanisms fail, economic structures are eroded and essential services are lacking. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by these violations of international law, with severe consequences. Meanwhile men and boys are affected too, including in places of detention.

Many of today's humanitarian crises are related to armed conflict. Sexual violence is often employed as a strategy or practice of war and terror, constituting a violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The physical, psychological, psychosocial and economic consequences of sexual and gender-based violence can significantly undermine the fabric of whole communities. Left unaddressed, the serious effects on survivors and their communities have wide-ranging negative consequences long after humanitarian emergencies have been resolved.

Data on sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian contexts is sporadic, difficult to track and often under-reported. It is commonly understood that at least one in five internally displaced or refugee women has experienced sexual violence - with displacement creating specific risks. Groups in vulnerable situations, such as women and girls with disabilities, are at higher risk than others of experiencing sexual violence. Girls under the age of 18 in particular, but also boys in this age group often make up the majority of survivors of SGBV, including sexual violence in conflict.

As SGBV is a feature of every humanitarian crisis, effective services should be available in all humanitarian settings. This is not currently the case. The absence of response services in many settings, the fear of stigma or retaliation, and other barriers often prevent survivors of SGBV from seeking vital support.

Progress and gaps in the humanitarian response

The humanitarian response to SGBV has improved in recent years. Global initiatives, including the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, the UN commitment to the centrality of protection in humanitarian action, and many other initiatives insist on the obligations of States and actors to address the issue. There has been growing attention to this

area, including through commitments made at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and through the 2015 resolution on sexual and gender-based violence adopted by States parties to the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

However, much work remains to be done.

First, the affected population should always be at the centre of the response. It is essential, for instance, to strengthen the participation of local women's NGO's, other civil society groups, and Red Cross or Red Crescent National Societies that are addressing SGBV. Affected people should be given a role in humanitarian coordination across all clusters, and it should be ensured that humanitarian funding reaches local humanitarian actors to the extent possible, notably local women's organizations.

Local women and women's groups are among the first responders in a crisis, and often start rebuilding while the crisis is still ongoing. Their needs and capacities should be taken into account and they should be engaged as active partners in the design and implementation of interventions. This involvement will help shift harmful social norms standing in the way of SGBV prevention and of access to services by survivors. This will alleviate suffering and protect the human dignity of survivors, and in the longer-term address the root causes of SGBV, by building inclusive and just societies that protect the rights of all members of society.

Second, in the context of increasing protracted humanitarian crises, more needs to be done to prevent SGBV from occurring in the first place. For example, sexual violence is not an inevitable part of war – and not all armed actors rape. This means that violations can be prevented. Humanitarian organizations (for example the ICRC) seek to work with governments on policies and legal frameworks to ensure that the most adequate laws are in place. They support States in their requirement to disseminate IHL and assist with training military personnel, civil servants and law enforcement agents in how to address sexual violence. Their work also includes dialogue with non-State armed groups about their obligations under IHL. In addition, local and national systems for preventing and responding to SGBV, including conflict-related sexual violence, need to be reinforced.

Third, the quality of humanitarian response needs to be further enhanced so that all aspects of SGBV programming are survivor-centred. Only in this way can nondiscrimination, and respect for the choices, rights and dignity of the survivor be promoted and preserved and greater safety assured. Medical support (clinical management of rape), mental health and psychosocial interventions, access to justice and functional referral systems, safety and security measures, and recovery and livelihood strategies must all be safely and accessible for SGBV survivors. All humanitarian actors must be capable of leading survivors safely and ethically to specialist services.

Fourth, the humanitarian system needs a more integrated approach. In line with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action, measures to prevent and mitigate the risk of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, must be integral to each of the humanitarian sectors –

from protection to shelter, water and sanitation, food security and nutrition, to health and education. The work should to the extent possible be carried out with relevant government entities, focusing on frontline responders, and supported by an accountability framework towards those affected. This approach will enable creation of effective institutional platforms for enhancing the quality of specialized services to prevent SGBV.

Finally, a durable SGBV response needs to be better financed and capacitated. Additional financial resources and increased human resource capacity are required to strengthen protection measures, increase access to life-saving services, including reliable and safe access to sexual and reproductive health services in order to protect women, adolescent girls and infants from preventable mortality and morbidity (A/RES/71/127), and reach everyone affected.

2019: Achieving momentum in the fight against sexual and genderbased violence including conflict-related sexual violence

OCHA has cited the Oslo conference as one of the major international resource mobilization and thematic policy events for 2019. It is one in a series of international highlevel events that is to take place in 2019 focusing on various aspects of SGBV and conflict-related sexual violence.

These events include: a Wilton Park event on justice for survivors, organized by the UK in February; the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women in March; an international conference on sexual violence in fragile environments, organized by Luxembourg in March; the Security Council open debate on sexual violence in conflict and the International Conference on Population and Development in April; a Wilton Park event on prevention of violence against women and girls in May; the Human Rights Council and the Women Deliver Global Conference in Canada in June; the Call to Action annual meeting in June; the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict mandate at the UN in New York and the Security Council open debate on Women, Peace and Security, both in October; as well as the Global Summit on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to be organized by the UK in November, the Nairobi Summit ICPD +25 in November, and the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December. In addition, the Government of the Republic of Korea plans to organize an international conference on women, peace and security at some point this year.

The only one of these events focusing principally on humanitarian prevention and response to SGBV is the Oslo conference. As such it will offer a unique perspective, aimed at mobilizing commitments and resources for a thematic priority applicable to all humanitarian response.

The prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) has rightly received significant attention as a form of SGBV. PSEA has been the focus of a number of recent high-level events and is included in the Call to Action. It will however not be a primary feature of this Conference.

Objectives

Mobilize stronger political commitment to prevent incidents and protect people at risk of SGBV, including conflict-related sexual violence, and ensuring that SGBV response is life-saving and timely, and promotes the needs, rights and dignity of survivors and those at risk.

Mobilize additional financial resources for gender-based violence programmes within UN-coordinated humanitarian response plans, the ICRC operational response to sexual violence and other humanitarian efforts to protect and promote the dignity and resilience of survivors and their communities, including host communities.

Highlight best practices and lessons learned from efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV in humanitarian situations, and help improve the evidence base in this field.

Build partnerships, including South-South cooperation, and build the capacity of women-led organizations, and other local actors, as first-responders and in line with the localisation agenda. Contribute to achievement of the goals of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence.

Strengthen links between humanitarian response to SGBV and longer-term political efforts to build peace and development in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Outcome

A chair's summary, including political, operational and financial commitments.

Programme

The high-level segment of the conference will take place on 24 May, and will build on the outcome of a civil society segment organized on 23 May by Norwegian Church Aid in cooperation with other civil society partners.

¹ In line with its humanitarian mandate linked to International Humanitarian Law, the ICRC responds to the needs of victims/survivors of violence – including sexual violence – and pursues efforts to prevent sexual violence, particularly in the context of armed conflicts and other situations of violence and in detention, working in a complementary way with its Red Cross Red Crescent Movement partners, who address SGBV, including in contexts of disaster.