



GENERAL ASSEMBLIES | 2014



UN GA COMMISSION ON WOMEN IN CONFLICT



Honorable delegates,

It is my sincere pleasure to welcome you to the Commission on Women in Conflict in the General Assembly of the United Nations! My name is Ghannia Bokhari and as the Director of this committee, I look forward to working with you during the UTMUN 2013 Conference. I am a third year student at the University of Toronto, where I am studying Political Science and Criminology. Personally, I wanted this year's Commission on Women to be dedicated to tackling and solving the issues of the current most vulnerable population on the globe: women residing in or near areas of conflict. I hope the three topics that I have chosen will captivate your interests, and will inspire fruitful and relevant discussions that lead to some promising resolutions aimed at resolving these global issues.

Your task and responsibility as a delegate in this committee is to adhere with the foreign policy of the country you are representing. I encourage you to cooperate with other member states when possible and maintain the academic integrity and authenticity of this forum by constructively debating and modifying proposed resolutions. Having a large knowledge base is key to being successful as a delegate; I would advise that you come well versed with the intricacies of each topic and your country's foreign policies.

This background guide contains a brief overview of the three topics that will be discussed in February. It serves as a launching point for the remainder of your research. It includes a brief summary of the topic, a description of relevant issues, a description of some relevant member states, and several useful links.

I hope your preparations for and attendance at the upcoming conference is an exciting, educating, and enriching experience. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

I wish you the best of luck and I look forward to seeing you in February!

Cheers,
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Topic 1: The Use of Rape In War

SUMMARY

Over the past century, rape and sexual abuse have been increasingly used as deliberate military strategies during war and armed conflicts. When rape is used as a tactic of warfare, it is systematic and designed to inflict humiliation on the enemy and psychological harm on its victims. Despite being outlawed as crimes against humanity and war crimes under the Geneva Convention, war rape and sexual slavery remains widespread in conflict zones, especially in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia, Somalia, and Sudan. Ultimately, war rape is a human rights issue and is not only a threat to international security, but also a violation of women's rights and autonomy. The United Nations needs to adopt substantial and effective strategies to end sexual violence and bring its perpetrators to justice.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

Rape, when executed in a systematic and large-scale approach, is deliberately designed to inflict psychological and sociological harm on its victims and the enemy. Mass rape, has historically been utilized to assault the masculinity of men and patriarchal figures of local communities. Rape uses the physical brutalization of women to send a psychological message to men, denigrating their ability to protect the women of their communities from assault and harassment. This can be partially acceded to the cultural stigma attached to rape; men feel powerless, inadequate and humiliated when women in their social groupings are victimized.

Still, women are the greatest victims and suffer the most. The trauma of rape causes many psychological impacts associated with symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); constant fear, shame, memory loss, insomnia, aggression, anxiety, nightmares, withdrawal, and self-loathing. Women are stripped of their dignity and their sense of self is destroyed, heightening their sense of isolation. This emotional scarring makes it difficult for these women to maintain their familial lives. Rape victims are abandoned by their communities and support systems because of the negative stigma attached to rape. They are rejected by their families and lose all marriage prospects. Community bonds and social cohesion in society is broken down and weakened.

SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS

Gender-based violence has also exacerbated the spread of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS and has increased the exposure of HIV among women in conflict areas. Rape by an infected perpetrator directly exposes the victim to the virus. Furthermore, rape, when committed on such a mass scale, exposes a substantial number of individuals to the virus. A lack of access to health services and facilities exacerbates the detrimental physical consequences of the rape. It is



common for healthcare infrastructure to be destroyed amidst times of conflict and war, rendering these victims helpless in receiving basic healthcare.

Therefore, women who desperately require medical attention are deprived of it. Such injuries, when left untreated for prolonged durations, become more and more aggravated and even life-threatening. The few medical facilities that are unscathed by war and remain intact are often not equipped with the resources to treat rape victims. Under such poor conditions, where health services are limited and sanitation plausibly dire, a breeding ground for HIV epidemics is sown.

RAPE AS A MILITARY STRATEGY

War rape is perpetrated not only by militia forces or rebel troops, but also by state military forces. Mass rape has developed as a deliberate war strategy used by the military to terrorize the civilian population into submission. Typically such orders are passed down to government security forces because the civilian population is viewed as the enemy in line with the rebel/opposing forces and a threat against the current regime, regardless of whether they were actually supported the opposing forces. In this case, soldiers are ordered to raid villages in an organized and brutal fashion and are not held accountable for the crimes they commit in the process. Mass rape is committed indiscriminately as a way of brutalizing the population, demoralizing the opponent, and displaying power and victory over the population.

KEY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Democratic Republic of Congo:

The DRC is known as the “world capital for rape” due to the massive and systematic perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence that has occurred within its borders during the past twenty years. In 2006, the DRC amended its penal code to prevent and reprimand infractions related to sexual violence and ensure systematic support for rape victims. However, the new laws have had little impact on sexual and gender-based violence in the region, as rape statistics are rising, particularly in the North Kivu province.

RELATED LINKS

- Rape as a Crime of War:
<http://www.womens-rights.org/Publications/JAMA%2093.pdf>
- Rape as a Weapon of War in the DRC:
http://www.irct.org/Files/Filer/TortureJournal/22_1_2012/Rape-as-weapon-war-1-2012.pdf



Topic 2: Asylum Claims

SUMMARY

The increased targeting of noncombatants in conflict zones results in forced displacement and mass migration. Many of these displaced persons claim they are refugees, but this claim has not been definitively evaluated. Hence, these individuals are termed asylum seekers. The number of asylum seekers has increased rapidly over the years with the rise in armed conflicts in Asia and Africa. As such, most claims origin from Afghanistan, Syria, Serbia, China, and Pakistan. National asylum systems in Western, European, and industrialized states are left to decide whether these asylum seekers qualify for international protection and immigration on the basis of their refugee status. Since the number of asylum seekers is rapidly increasing, asylum systems have to operate with increased speed and efficiency, processing the applications quickly and fairly.

The majority of asylum seekers are women and children fleeing from the violence and persecution in their home countries, in hope of receiving protection for their fundamental human rights. Many seek asylum in other countries but are denied this due to the failure of national asylum systems in Western and European states. As a result, a majority of asylum seekers either remain in their own countries where they live precarious existences or reside in refugee camps. These camps have terrible living conditions due to overcrowding and/or a lack of proper sanitation, resulting in high infection rates, malnutrition, etc. The United Nations must take steps to aid the resettlement of refugees and ensure the safety of protection of women who are displaced by armed conflict.

THE CONDITIONS OF REFUGEE CAMPS

As the conflict exacerbates, refugee camps become more and more overcrowded and living standards deteriorate significantly. One of the biggest problems with refugee camps is the lack of stable infrastructure. The houses are poorly ventilated, overcrowded, usually without window screens or solid doors, and lack the necessities needed to house individuals for long periods of time. These shelters are highly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions and often lead to extreme sanitation issues that can accelerate the outbreak of diseases and infection. Residence in refugee camps is meant to be temporary so the residence structures are built to house individuals for a short period of time and include either small tent-like structures or pre-fabricated one-room units. The lack of alternative housing available for asylum seekers forces them to reside in such unstable and temporary housing whilst their asylum claims are being processed.

The lack of stable food and water resources is another serious issue. Refugee camps provide limited rations that frequently fall short of the daily-recommended food and water necessary in maintaining a healthy diet. The quantity and quality of food are just enough to meet basic food



standards as refugee camps are stocked with a limited variety of food. Subsequently, refugees often suffer from chronic malnutrition, making them more susceptible to diseases and illnesses.

Ultimately, refugee camps are not sustainable for large displaced populations for large periods of time, and hence, these asylum seekers need to be located to more stable, sustainable, and permanent housing. Many secondary concerns arise from such temporary housing structures. Poor living conditions provide adults and even children with an impetus to be recruited into violence, raising security issues.

FLAWS IN THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

The procedures and processes of asylum systems in industrialized states are highly flawed which exacerbates the already deplorable circumstances stacked against these displaced asylum seekers. Though procedures differ from state to state, some overall flaws and discrepancies can still be noted.

One of the main issues is a political one: Western and European states create legislation that restricts the number of individuals accepted into the country on the basis of asylum claims. With the increase of asylum claims, states are amending their immigration policies to grant fewer immigration permits to displaced persons. Aggressive policies relating to detention and deportation of asylum seekers creates an inflexible and uncompassionate system that disempowers them. The root of such policy-making is merely a matter of politicking as political parties hold different approaches towards asylum system and how they should operate. Part of this political rift is the issue of how much government spending should be assigned to asylum systems and immigration law enforcement. These policies seriously impact the adjudication process, which evaluates individual asylum cases.

A second major issue is the mistreatment and torture of asylum seekers in host countries by law enforcement officials. Once they enter into the asylum system, these individuals are put at risk of abusive treatment and arbitrary detention by border police and enforcement officials. The host countries have been unable to provide effective protection for these displaced citizens. There have been an increasing number of reports on the inhuman and degrading treatment asylum seekers are put through, particularly when they enter the European Union's asylum system. The torture inflicted includes physical abuse, electro-shock treatments, food deprivation, and being detained in overcrowded and unsanitary locations.

Another major problem includes issues surrounding the adjudication process, which judges the asylum claims and grants immigration. It is becoming increasingly difficult for asylum seekers to receive a fair hearing. Part of the problem is the lack of legal support provided to refugees, who



are forced to represent themselves at tribunals (often without translators or interpreters) because of the severe cuts made to legal aid programs. This makes it difficult for them to adequately argue their case and have a fair trial. The adjudication process is also very slow and ineffective because most decisions made are overturned or appealed. The high appeal rate and drawn-out judicial processes have led to a backlog of asylum applications that will take years to resolve.

All of these issues are slowing down the asylum process and making it increasingly difficult for asylum seekers to relocate to a secure location where they can begin their lives anew.

KEY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

United States:

The United States is the country that receives the highest number of asylum claims as each year around 100,000 people apply for asylum in America. After the events of 9/11, the U.S. has tightened its asylum and immigration law policies, making it extremely difficult to be granted immigration on the basis of one's refugee status and increasing the application processing time. In 2010, the Refugee Protection Act was introduced in the Senate, which would free up administrative resources and ensure adequate substantial and procedural safeguards for asylum seekers. In 2013, it was reintroduced in the Senate in order to prevent the unnecessary and prolonged detention of asylum seekers and preserve a refugee's ability to appeal their case.

United Kingdom:

The United Kingdom is the 5th country to receive the highest amount of asylum claims, followed by Germany, France, and Sweden. The UK and other European states are making final steps towards establishing a joint and common European Asylum System under the European Union. The new EU asylum policies will lay down common procedures and deadlines for handling applications, ensure a basic set of rights for asylum seekers and ban transfers of asylum applicants to member states unable to ensure decent living conditions for them. If approved, the new system will take effect in 2015.

RELEVANT LINKS

- The Status and Conditions of Refugee Camps: <http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/>
- The Asylum Process in the United States: <http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/76-navigating-the-asylum-process-in-the-u-s>
- United Kingdom's Failing Asylum System: <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20Exec%20summaries/AsylumMatters.pdf>



Topic 3: Access to Education

SUMMARY

Education is a fundamental human right and is essential for the exercise of other fundamental rights. Yet, millions of people are denied access to education, mainly due to poverty, but also due to gender. In conflict zones, women are denied many employment prospects because of a lack of education, restricting social mobility.

Furthermore, education is a social service that is most susceptible to disruption when conflict breaks. Schools become target areas and teachers and students are forced to seek protection elsewhere. In these cases, women and young girls are the first to abandon their education. Yet, armed conflict makes the need for education more pressing in terms of preventing the outbreak of diseases like HIV/AIDS, and the role it plays in helping rebuild communities. The United Nations must implement policies that grant women in conflict zones access to education so that they can escape danger, ensure the protection of themselves and their families, and give them the skills to support and rebuild their communities.

EDUCATION AS A PREVENTATIVE MECHANISM FOR CONFLICT

The access to education and information are essentially assets that can be used by individuals to not only deal with the effects of conflict, but to prevent conflict altogether. Education allows for individuals to make their own informed decisions, to participate in society, to earn a living and improve and control their future prospects. Unfortunately, the vast majority of illiterate adults are women. Once women are provided with access to education, they can make a more valuable and necessary contribution to peace processes and peace establishment. Education plays a big role in peace building because it is socially transformative. It creates stability within a society and provides individuals with the skills needed to mitigate and respond to conflict.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PREVENTING THE OUTBREAK OF DISEASES IN CONFLICT ZONES

The outbreak of conflict can speed up the spread of infectious diseases and illnesses, such as HIV/AIDS, especially in refugee camps where the living conditions are conducive to the spread of diseases. Education plays a crucial role in preventing the spread of diseases by raising awareness of the disease, availability of and access to health services, and treatment options.

The spread of HIV/AIDS is a more female-centric issue as women and girls are significantly more likely to become infected with HIV/AIDS than men or boys. Refugees are particularly exposed to populations with HIV/AIDS due to a lack of health and education services in refugee camps. In order to curb the spread of diseases, education and health training must be provided so that women and girls can protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and its subsequent health issues.



THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PEACE TALKS AND DIPLOMACY EFFORTS

Women and girls are not only victims of armed conflict, but also active agents and participants. They can be manipulated into taking up military roles by force or propaganda or can indirectly support war efforts by disseminating propaganda. A lack of education among women can also seriously impact their participation in peace processes and grass-root efforts aimed at rebuilding their communities.

Women have traditionally played a very limited role in peace processes and diplomacy efforts and are likely to be under or unrepresented. Education cultivates the skills and opportunities whereby women can voice their opinions regarding conflict and be able to provide alternatives for resolving the conflict without the use of violence. Peace education can be promoted through the improvement of school environments, developing school curricula, and cultivating societal and peaceful values. Increasing the access to education allows women to engage and contribute to their societies as politicians, leaders of NGOs, and active campaigners of peace.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STABILITY

Educational and training opportunities give women the skills to be able to provide for themselves and their own families. Widespread conflict results in social fragmentation and the stagnation of economic growth as it results in high unemployment rates due to mass displacement. A nation's capital is crucial for economic progress and development. Women with basic education and skills training have the ability to accumulate and generate capital as they become increasingly involved in the job sector due to their qualifications. Therefore, trained and education women play a crucial role in economic recovery.

Educated and trained women are also better able to secure a stable food or economic resource for their families in the aftermath of the conflict. Education provides women with the tools to maintain their own socio-economic autonomy and support their local communities by providing basic food and non-food assistance. Such resources are vital when rebuilding communities and leads to increased social cohesion, which is necessary for the stabilization of a post-conflict zone.

RELEVANT LINKS

- The Role of Women in Peacebuilding
<http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/cont/descargas/documento7201.pdf?pg=cont/descargas/documento7201.pdf>
- The Role of Education in Preventing Conflict:
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.10.4495&rep=rep1&type=pdf>