



Women's Struggles for Justice

A Roundtable on Confronting
Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict

February 2009

 *Inter Pares*

WORKING FOR CHANGE...AMONG EQUALS
OEUVRER POUR LE CHANGEMENT...ENTRE ÉGAUX

Inter Pares is a Canadian-based international social justice organization that works to promote international cooperation and social transformation in Canada and around the world. Inter Pares collaborates in over twenty countries and supports organizing and policy advocacy efforts of civil society and popular organizations as they mobilize to promote women's rights, peace, democracy and sustainable livelihoods. Through research, documentation, education, coalition-building, policy advocacy and convening exchanges, Inter Pares promotes public engagement and social action on the causes, effects, and solutions to the disempowerment, exclusion, and alienation experienced by marginalized groups worldwide, particularly women.

Inter Pares is a feminist organization, a characteristic manifested in our non-hierarchical internal structure, methodological approach and relationships with others. Inter Pares' perspective is that programming opportunities for deepening knowledge, action, and reciprocity for the future are critical to the growth and development of civil society around the world.

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1. Introduction

Over the years, Inter Pares has invested in building knowledge and relationships in Canada and internationally concerning the role of women in situations of conflict, post-conflict, peacebuilding, and processes of truth, justice and reparation. This has led to an understanding that while the role of women in challenging impunity for human rights abuses perpetrated against their families and communities is widely recognized and made the centre of peace programming, rarely do women speak about the violence perpetrated against themselves, particularly when it involves sexual violence. Inter Pares and our counterparts from Asia, Africa and Latin America have developed a close collaboration in promoting and protecting the human rights of women who have been victimized in this way, as well as their rights for access to justice and reparations.

Building on this trust and solidarity, Inter Pares is able to act as a responsible convener by bringing people and organizations together around shared agendas: identifying and reinforcing means of effective collaboration; researching, documenting and sharing diverse approaches to social transformation; articulating policy options gleaned from a rich diversity of experience; and nurturing sustainable relationships among the various organizations with which we work.

It is in this spirit that Inter Pares convened a Roundtable, entitled “Women’s Struggles for Justice: Confronting Sexual Violence Against Women in Armed Conflict,” with over 20 participants from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Canada. The one-and-a-half-day Roundtable in September 2007 was held in order to deepen our knowledge and broaden our understanding on the issue of sexual violence in armed conflict, drawing on the diversity of contextual analyses and experiences of our counterparts.¹

1.1 The Roundtable Process – An “Open Agenda”

Inter Pares convened the Roundtable in order to create a rare opportunity for activists to reflect on and consolidate knowledge and action, and advance feminist analysis and strategies on the issue of sexual violence against women in armed conflict. Invited participants were all women, with significant experience working on issues related to sexual violence against women in armed

conflict. Though all were affiliated with national networks, local women’s groups or internationally affiliated consortia, participants were not expected to represent their institutions per se, but to engage in the Roundtable process in their personal capacity as activists in countries at war or countries dealing with the aftermath of war. Participants came from Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Burundi, Sudan and Burma (biographies are attached in Annex 1). Eight Inter Pares staff members also joined the Roundtable as facilitators, documenters and participants.

The Roundtable was a space for participants to share experiences, explore strategies, create new knowledge and determine future areas of collaboration in a mutually supportive process. Together, we explored common tensions, dilemmas, and contradictions confronting our work on sexual violence against women in armed conflict, as well as the political and institutional challenges and opportunities.

The Roundtable was organized using an open agenda. Inter Pares has a long history of facilitating open-agenda processes. Rooted in feminist analysis and practice, this methodology critiques and resists the imposition of outside agendas and gives participants the power to influence the direction of discussion and future action. Everyone involved has a chance to speak to the topic in terms of their work and the context in which they struggle, sharing particular concerns and dilemmas they face. As themes and issues emerge, they are documented and organized as a collectively agreed-upon agenda, and discussion then proceeds accordingly.

1.2 Summary of Key Elements

This report outlines the issues and reflections raised throughout the course of the Roundtable. It is a summary, not a consensus document, and as such contains gaps and contradictions. There are broad generalizations which speak to the context participants faced in their daily lives, and specific examples are also given.

Overarching themes identified and discussed were:

- Situating sexual violence against women during armed conflict and its causes within a continuum of violence against women;
- Strategies and methodologies to work with women survivors of sexual violence;

¹ Inter Pares gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the International Development Research Centre for the organization of the roundtable.

- Strategies for assisting women survivors of sexual violence in seeking and obtaining justice.

This document is a means to share and continue this reflection, with a view toward action.

2. Analytical Framework

2.1 Feminism and Patriarchy as a Lens

If we don't touch patriarchy, the root cause of this violence, then how will we address state violence?

– Nang Lao Liang Won, Burma

The executive committee of the [Actoras de Cambio] Consortium uses feminism as a very valuable theoretical basis from which to take forward the work ... at the same time, we participate in the struggles of the women's movement in Guatemala to transform the social condition of women.

– Luz Méndez, Guatemala

If we used the term "patriarchal system" the issue would be a lot clearer.

– Maria Ysabel Cedano, Peru

Our discussion began with a provocative question: Why were we talking about sexual violence in armed conflict? What was it about this particular human rights abuse that was useful as a unifying concept? Or was it so useful? Violence against women, including sexual violence, exists before wars or conflicts take place, and the signing of peace accords signifying the transition to a "post-conflict" situation does not eradicate this violence. Sexual violence does not only occur in armed conflict. In fact, one participant suggested that sexual violence is most dangerous when it is not linked to armed conflict because it can be rendered invisible and taboo.

There are many forms of violence that women face and, in our discussion, it was important to situate sexual violence within a larger framework of violence against women. Speaking only of sexual violence can be limiting as it can further objectify women and obscure the myriad other ways in which women are affected by conflict.

In one of the documents given to Roundtable participants in preparation for the discussion, "Sexuality,

Violence Against Women, and Human Rights: Women Make Demands and Ladies Get Protection," Alice Miller explains that women are often seen as a particular *kind* of victim, submissive and violated, without power or agency.

The recognition that sexual harm has begun to operate in isolation from other injustices as the worst abuse that can happen to a woman should alert us to the uncomfortable similarities, and differences, between this position and a position we fight against – that the most important thing to know about a woman is her chastity. (Miller, 2004, p. 19)²

A "narrow frame of sexual harm ... tends to reduce women to suffering bodies in need of protection by the law and the state, rather than as bodies and minds in need not only of protection, but participation and equality" (Miller, 2004, p. 27). Acknowledgement of the political context is often lacking, and a broader political movement for women's rights is overshadowed by a focus on the "victim."

As was discussed during the Roundtable, such a narrow framing of the issue can lead to responses that focus on protecting women rather than on enabling them to exercise their rights. A conceptual and practical focus on sexual violence in armed conflict should be a conscious decision, of use to those who are aware of what it may obscure and the power dynamics at play. We need to ask what other kinds of violence women are subjected to in war and in what other ways they are affected.

Sexual violence during armed conflict is strategically used as a weapon of war and a vicious manifestation of a deeper ill – that is, a patriarchal society where violence is used to exercise control and power over women. In our subsequent discussions and analyses, we were challenged to look beyond the phenomenon of armed conflict, and beyond sexual violence against women.

A feminist analysis begins with women's experiences – in this case, their experience of sexual violence in armed conflict – and places these experiences within a larger social context. Feminism is a way of understanding the world that recognizes the existence of unequal power relations among people based on gender, race, class and other categorizations. A feminist analysis clarifies and names these inequalities as a first step in challenging

² Miller, A. (2004). Sexuality, violence against women and human rights: Women make demands and ladies get protection. *Health and Human Rights*, Vol 17(2), p. 17-47.

Guatemala



- a largely mountainous country of 108,890 km²
- gained independence from Spain in 1821
- one of only two countries in the Americas with an indigenous majority (along with Bolivia)
- though Spanish is the official language, there are 21 distinct Mayan languages and several non-Mayan indigenous languages

During Guatemala's 40 year civil war, over 200,000 people were killed or "disappeared" – the majority of them indigenous – and up to two million people internally and externally displaced – a third of the country's population at the time.

From 2003 to 2005, over 600 women were assassinated in Guatemala City. The particularly brutal nature of the killings (the women have been raped, tortured and mutilated in a similar fashion to war-time extra-judicial executions), as well as the death threats received by women's organizations trying to investigate the crimes, has led to speculation that paramilitary organizations linked to state structures are involved.

them. During the Roundtable, we brought our feminist analysis to bear on the issue, looking at power, how it is exerted in society, and situating sexual violence against women in armed conflict along a continuum of violence against women. Many participants expressed their appreciation of feminist analyses, which inform their understanding of the context in which they work. A fundamental unifying concept throughout the Roundtable was that patriarchy – broadly speaking, the organized domination of men over women and the exercise of power by a few over a marginalized many – was the root cause not just of sexual violence in armed conflict, but all forms of violence against women.

Rape and sexual violence are violations aimed at taking or asserting power. But the assertion of patriarchal power has many other manifestations relating to sex and sexuality. How is sexuality portrayed and perceived and what is the connection between sexuality and sexual violence? What is its connection to patriarchy and power?

In the experience of Roundtable participants, sexuality in most countries and cultures is dichotomized, and men and women's sexuality is socially regulated: for boys and men, it is about domination, and for women and girls, it is about submission. Children and adolescents are raised with these polarized sexual messages in both traditional and popular cultures. Girls are supposed to be sexually attractive, signalling their availability for sex, and be paradoxically chaste at the same time. Boys, on the other hand, are told directly or indirectly that the female body is the battleground to be conquered through masculinity. In Latin America, the concept of

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"machismo," although nuanced, includes the idea that women are primarily sexual objects, existing to satisfy the sexual demands of men; that women are stupid and weak; and that a woman is either a saint or a whore. So when sexual violence is perpetrated, it is normalized with the explanation that the girl was asking for it through her sexualized dress or behaviour and that "boys will be boys."

At the same time, talk of sex by women is taboo because it is portrayed as a shameful act. Girls are sexualized

at a young age, but unable to speak about it. This can be very confusing, creating a disconnection between the mind and the body. The mind is told to remain chaste, while the body is sexualized. The taboo that surrounds any discussion of sexuality facilitates the perpetration of sexual violence and condemns those who denounce it publicly.

Sudan is illustrative. When a few political leaders first began speaking about female genital mutilation, they were called “empty-minded” as they supposedly had nothing better to do than to talk about women’s sexual organs. The sexual violence that accompanied the 50-year long war between the North and South of Sudan was never spoken of, remaining invisible and unaddressed.

In the case of Darfur where sexual violence is widespread and systematic, at first there was whole-scale denial, even among progressive Sudanese women and men. When the issue was raised, the general response was that sexual violence wasn’t happening and in any case, it wasn’t important – men were dying, so why talk about women being raped? When the scale of the violence couldn’t be denied any longer, the government response was that this was not rape. It was portrayed as an expression of sexuality that was part of the traditional culture in Darfur, that there was more sexual freedom in Darfur and promiscuity on the part of Darfurian women was part of the sexual norm. Sexual violence is made invisible when the mere mention of sexuality is taboo and when violence is excused as normal or as a fixture of culture. A Sudanese judge has even gone as far as saying that women should expect to be raped, that they were created to be raped.

2.2 Continuum of Violence

Is sexual violence structurally inherent in gender relations or is it a consequence of war?

– Asha El-Karib, Sudan

Domestic violence and other forms of sexual assault ... function as mechanisms of control over the bodies and sexuality of women, affecting the development of their subjectivity, their desires, and their autonomy.

–Maria Ysabel Cedano, Peru

What is the most dangerous actually? Sexual violence during armed conflict, where there may be access to compensation or reparations? Or sexual violence in the family where you are supposed to pretend it never happens and just raise your family?

– Asha El-Karib, Sudan

When we sanction the past, we support sexual violence in the present.

– Luz Méndez, Guatemala

We educate the public on the significance of sexual violence during armed conflict as a serious violation of human rights, pointing to the structural causes of violence against women and its current existence. We seek to dismantle the stigmatization of women victims of sexual violence in their own

communities. We also seek to influence the women’s movement with the aim of incorporating into collective discourse and demands the link between sexual violence and all forms of violence against women: domestic violence, sexual violence in war and the ongoing murders of women.

– Luz Méndez, Guatemala

At the outset of our discussion, there was a consensus that sexual violence was not only a characteristic of armed conflict. Though often exacerbated during conflict, it is a broader phenomenon, existing before conflict and continuing after peace accords and agreements are signed. Its ubiquity and longevity illustrate that it is an entrenched expression of a patriarchal system.

What gives a perpetrator the legitimacy, the power or the excuse to use sexual violence as a weapon in war? Is what happens in the public sphere separate from what occurs in the private sphere?

Sexual violence, as a part of the abuse that women suffer in their homes from intimate partners, fathers, brothers, or uncles, is difficult to address. For example, rape between husband and wife is often not recognized, or if it is recognized, not reported. Where and when sexual violence exists as a way to exert masculinity and dominance in the home and community pre-conflict, it

Burma



- an area of 675,000 km²
- most observers estimate the total multiethnic and multilingual population to be around 50 million people
- under a series of military dictatorships since 1962

Burma was renamed “Myanmar” by the country’s ruling military regime in 1989. However, the democracy movement, Canada, the United States, the European Union, and many major media outlets continue to use the term “Burma” as a symbolic protest against the military regime.

Burma’s junta held an election in 1990, presumably believing it would win, but lost in a landslide to the National League for Democracy. The leader of this winning party and future Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, was promptly put under house arrest. She has been imprisoned in her own home for nearly 12 of the last 17 years.

There are usually between one and two thousand political prisoners in Burma, including nearly forty elected members of parliament.

The regime’s systematic human rights abuses in Burma have led to the mass movement of people. There are approximately 600,000 internally displaced people and refugees are leaving Burma everyday, fleeing to Bangladesh, India, China, Thailand and Malaysia.

In 2002 the Shan Human Rights Foundation and the Shan Women’s Action Network produced a report, “License to Rape”, documenting the systematic use of sexual violence against women in Shan state by the military regime. Since then several other organizations have produced reports on the use of rape as a weapon of war throughout the nation.

readily translates into a tactic to exert dominance over the enemy during conflict. What is “legitimately” done in private confers legitimacy to acts in war; thus, the distinction between private and public forms of violence ought to be problematized. When sexual violence lurks inside homes and communities, it journeys all the way to the theatre of war.

This continuum of violence has led many activists who work on sexual violence during armed conflict to more closely examine violence in the “private” sphere. To reveal publicly what was done privately creates a strong and direct connection between the two. There was broad agreement among Roundtable participants that

sexual violence in armed conflict exists as a result of its widespread acceptance in society before conflict. Consequently, in our feminist analyses of this issue, we made no conceptual division between the public and the private. The distinction should only be made tactically and consciously if it allows the issue to be deconstructed and addressed strategically. For instance, it may be strategic to speak specifically about sexual violence in armed conflict or about domestic violence in particular campaigns or legal cases.

In “post-conflict” societies, patriarchal structures of power, along with other structures of power that existed before and during the conflict, often remain unaltered.

The voices and experiences of women are rarely incorporated into peace negotiations. Members of the military and other armed groups who were taught and then ordered to perpetrate crimes of sexual violence become part of the police or government. They join gangs. They become part of the elite. They go back home to their families. The underlying order of society is not challenged and sexual violence remains embedded in “post-conflict” society.

In some ways, state-sponsored violence, a much more visible form of violence, is easier to identify and confront because it is socially and politically acceptable to denounce the state as the enemy.

Addressing domestic violence and violence in the community by intimate family members requires not just an absence of

conflict, but a fundamental change in societal power structures. It requires a dismantling of patriarchy – a much broader and far-reaching project.

3. Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

Sexual violence against women in conflict zones is widespread and systematic, perpetrated by military officers and soldiers ... women have to bear the greatest burden of the systematic attacks as they are doubly oppressed on the grounds of both their ethnicity and their gender.

– Zipporah Sein, Burma

Is it conflict that exacerbates the patriarchal system or is it the opposite?

– Fahima Hashim, Sudan

Across different contexts, the nature of sexual violence in armed conflict has a number of commonalities:

- It serves a political purpose;
- It utilizes and reinforces gender roles, power dynamics, and stereotypes;
- It normalizes sexual violence against women.

The brutality of sexual violence is exacerbated in the context of war and armed conflict. It is often associated with other forms of torture, physical mutilation and

killing and puts an additional burden on women and communities who are already vulnerable. Sexual violence in armed conflict also discourages women who have fled from returning to their homes, denying them their livelihood and excluding them from their rightful inheritance and land. It serves a political purpose: it is a way to exact revenge, a tool to humiliate communities, and so becomes an explicit means of political domination and an expression of social power.

Sexual violence as a weapon of war targets an opposing faction, or a civilian population caught in the middle of conflict, through inflicting harm on women who are

affiliated with that faction in the minds of the attackers. They are often seen by both sides as the property of men, and thus perpetrators see women's bodies as part of the spoils of

conquest, goods to be damaged, and territory to be occupied. However, sexual violence in conflict often has ethnic and class dimensions. Women are targeted because they are often unarmed and vulnerable, but also because they are poor and of a particular ethnicity, often different from their attackers. In many situations, these women come from excluded and marginalized populations. Often they are rural and indigenous. As was the case in Guatemala, sexual violence plays a central role in implementing genocidal policies.

Militarization by the state brings increased levels of sexual violence. In contexts where an armed force and its associated power are concentrated, the prevalence of sexual attacks on women inevitably rises. Militarization is among the most explicit manifestations of patriarchy, with soldiers as the vehicles by which the state can exert control and dominance. Other armed actors also play an explicit role, often relying on the same tactics.

Sexual violence in armed conflict is not simply perpetrated sporadically and randomly by rogue members of the military or other armed groups. Soldiers exert control by their mere presence, but more importantly through the implementation of state-sanctioned policies directly promoting sexual violence as a means of subjugation. The military are in fact trained in this aspect – as are members of other armed groups – and raping or sexually

Burundi



- total population of 7 million, of whom 52% are women
- achieved independence from Belgium in 1962
- located in the African Great Lakes region
- Kirundi and French are the two official languages

Since 1993, Burundi went through a decade of civil war and political crisis,

which ended in 2005 after negotiations between various political factions.

Following the peace agreements, Burundi held democratic elections in 2005 during which the current political leaders were elected.

More than 200 000 people were killed during the war and more than 25% of the population was forced to internal and external exile.

The main forms of violence committed against women during the conflict are rape and other types of sexual violence, massacre and pillage, as well as forced enrolment in armed forces.

assaulting enemy women is a strategic tactic of war, rendering the phenomena of sexual violence in armed conflict systematic and ordered.

When states are involved in such human rights abuses, it gives sexual violence a particular quality. Rape is infused with hatred and a thirst for revenge; it seeks to desecrate and demolish the enemy. The sexual aggressors are given a degree of legitimacy even more so because the state, as the prime agent for upholding the rule of law, is clearly engaging in an abuse of power. Given the state's

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role in protecting and defending the rights of all its citizens, its reliance on sexual violence is a particularly acute abuse of power, distinct from the sexual violence perpetrated by other armed groups. Despite the centrality of the state as perpetrator, there must be recognition that the leaders who give orders and make policy are individuals and bear responsibility for the consequences of their commands.

Furthermore, gender stereotypes are manipulated for political and military ends by both state and non-state actors. During the conflict in Peru, the government distributed flyers that had, on one side, a picture of a guerrilla woman with the caption, "Do you want this?" On the other side there was a picture of a woman in a bikini with the caption, "Or do you want this?" The messages told men that living in peacetime meant having women at their disposal; this served to encourage men to participate in violent counter-insurgency, playing on the insecurities they felt at the prospect of women arming themselves and reinforcing the idea that women are sexual objects.

3.1 Breaking the Silence: Working with Survivors

Another dilemma we face is denial of the issue on the part of the community – by the women who, in needing to deny the violence they have experienced, end up denying sexual violence in general, and by the men who feel their masculinity is questioned when the issue of sexual violence is mentioned.

– Maria Ysabel Cedano, Peru

One challenge is the silence and shame of the victim and her network, preventing the punishment of perpetrators and stopping the evil.

– Sophie Havyarimana, Burundi

Sexual violence is still a secret and shameful thing that women are not confident to speak out about – within communities, there are still traditional ways it is perceived ... it is also a hard thing to speak out as it is traumatizing and women do not want to feel their suffering again. Finding cases to document is not easy. It is hard for a person who listens to this kind of suffering ...

– Zipporah Sein, Burma

Women rarely publicly acknowledge the violence that has been perpetrated against them. Being labelled as a victim of sexual violence is a difficult and sometimes dangerous thing. They face the social stigma that accompanies survivors and are blamed for the violence that befell them. They risk retribution by perpetrators. Talking about their experience opens traumatic wounds for which there are no clear avenues to seek healing or justice. Women worry about family or community reactions. Given the obstacles – fear, shame, and anxiety – it is incredible that women do speak out, at great risk to themselves. While we are supporting women who do break the silence, there is also a need to gain a greater collective understanding of women's silence – how fear and violence prevail, and how women perceive their own silence and the ways it is manifested.

Breaking the silence that surrounds sexual violence however, cannot be at the cost of the survivor's dignity. The centrality of an individual woman's experience and wishes for confidentiality demand profound respect. Women must have the option of being silent. Activists ask: Do we truly listen to what this silence tells us? And does our reaction, and the emphasis on confidentiality, reinforce the shame of sexual violence, or does it provide authentic support to the survivor?

When a survivor decides to speak out, either to tell her story or to pursue a judicial course of action, she needs to trust those who are supporting her. She needs guarantees of safety and psychosocial support, and sometimes a guarantee of confidentiality. The women's organizations and social justice/human rights groups who seek to empower survivors of sexual assault first engage in a process of building trust. In the case of the Women's League of Burma, this trust-building process takes the form of exchanges where women are given a

space to come together and discuss issues of concern. There is no pressure to speak about personal experiences or even sexual violence. It is an opportunity to engage in reflection about issues of personal concern and of concern to women in general. And once violence is spoken about, there is no pressure to follow any particular course of action, legal or otherwise. Patience, empathy and a belief in the process as opposed to the end result is required on the part of organizers. Similar practices take place in other contexts. Once this trust between groups and survivors exists, it is almost sacrosanct;

Given the obstacles – fear, shame, and anxiety – it is incredible that women do speak out, at great risk to themselves.

that trust should not be betrayed and survivors' stories instrumentalized. It is the foundation upon

which all future work, such as legal strategies or awareness campaigns, is built.

Survivors may have needs that cannot realistically or comprehensively be met by the organizations they are working with. For example, a common concern for women who speak out is safety. Revenge or retribution by the perpetrators, who may still hold positions of power in the communities or countries where the survivor lives, is a legitimate fear. Women may ask for guarantees of safety upon speaking publicly or denouncing their perpetrators. But what does it mean to guarantee someone's safety? Although civil society organizations can put measures in place to help ensure that women who speak out are not harassed, threatened or killed, it is beyond their means to *guarantee* safety. Survivors need to know this reality, even if it means they reconsider their course of action. Legal recourses to justice may, for instance, become life-threatening and too controversial to pursue due to the risks to safety.

There are contexts, primarily in active conflict zones, where documentation about the use of rape as a weapon of war has been compiled and publicly disseminated, yet the sexual aggression continues – Burma, Sudan and Colombia are good examples. Several roundtable participants expressed their anger and deep frustration at this situation. Documenting the use of rape as a weapon of war may have been used strategically to bring the issue to political light, but where are the women in the communities whose stories were used? Have they found safety? Have other women in the same or neighbouring communities found safety?

Colombia



- an area of 1,138,910 km²
- total population of over 44 million, of which approximately 2% are indigenous and 20% are Afro-Colombian
- 2% of Colombia's population is indigenous, but 12% of the displaced population is indigenous
- 66% of the displaced are women and children

Since 1985, as many as 3.8 million people have been displaced from their homes. It is not coincidental that the land they are being chased from is rich with natural resources. They continue to live in miserable conditions, even though the country's Constitutional Court has ordered the government to comply with its obligations towards the displaced.

During the first six months of 2006, at least 112,000 more people joined the displaced population due to ongoing violence of paramilitary, guerrilla and army forces.

Between 2002 and 2006, at least 1,139 women were victims of extrajudicial execution or political murder. In 2005, 38 women a day denounced that they had been raped. The underreporting in cases of sexual violence is estimated at 95%.

Counselling is a key component of the support organizations can provide for survivors. Whether or not women speak publicly about their experiences, once they have declared that they are survivors of sexual assault, some form of psychosocial support and accompaniment is usually central to their well-being. This support may take several forms, from individual to group processes, from Western-based methodologies to more indigenous forms of healing. Though there are many women who speak publicly without accompaniment, counselling or support, the importance of appropriate psychosocial support cannot be underestimated, particularly if women involved decide to take a more high-profile course of action where they are required to tell their story repeatedly.

The normalization of sexual violence must be uncovered and named, whether it exists against a backdrop of family and community sexual violence or as a "normal" part of warfare and conflict.

Collectively, in order to break the silence, it is critical to work towards making visible the crime of sexual violence. This involves breaking the taboo around discussing sex and sexuality as well as situating the issue of sexual violence within a larger framework of violence against women. The normalization of sexual violence must be uncovered and named, whether it exists against a backdrop of family and community sexual violence or as a "normal" part of warfare and conflict. Furthermore, an uncritical respect for culture can cause human rights and feminist issues to be ignored. Excessive cultural relativism can break the solidarity among women and contribute to the normalization of sexual violence, obscuring it as a crime.

There have been powerful collective efforts to speak out against sexual violence in armed conflict through documentation, in both conflict and post-conflict contexts. Both the process and outcome of documentation work can be empowering to women. In Burma, the ongoing use of rape as a weapon of war has been brought into wider political discussions and has given legitimacy to the previously silent voices of affected women. In Peru, the Truth Commission process that detailed the use of sexual violence during the conflict officially acknowledged for the first time the pain and trauma that rural indigenous women had endured.

3.2 Seeking Justice

We're really working on gender justice – that can meet the demands of women, but doesn't perceive women as outside the system We should challenge women [legal experts – lawyers, judges] to see themselves as 'women inside the system' and not just 'inside the system.'

– Maria Ysabel Cedano, Peru

Currently, a dilemma we face in our work is the "pact of impunity" that exists ... [between] the military ... the economic right-wing and the Catholic Church hierarchy in the interests of profit and tradition.

– Maria Ysabel Cedano, Peru

One of our principal dilemmas relates to impunity ... the main beneficiaries of the [Justice and Peace] law are the paramilitary groups that are negotiating with the government ... those responsible for serious human rights violations will not be adequately investigated, nor will they have to present themselves before the courts for their alleged crimes, and even less so for crimes that are considered ... of lesser relevance and magnitude, such as those against women and children.

– Claudia Ramírez, Colombia

How do we shape Truth Commission processes so that they are not so big and monolithic? How can we infiltrate and influence these institutions?

– Claudia Paz, Guatemala

We work in a legal vacuum of certain instruments such as the penal code where sentences are not significant and/or some clauses give undue flexibility to judges.

– Sophie Havyarimana, Burundi

The application of extraordinary laws to try members of illegal armed groups that have committed crimes against the civilian population during the armed conflict gripping the country are completely blind and deaf to the special needs of women.

– Claudia Ramírez, Colombia

The question of justice is a central one for women survivors and for activists working to support those survivors. What is a *just* outcome when sexual violence has been perpetrated in armed conflict? How does it relate to impunity? For the women survivors, for the perpetrators, for the families or communities affected?

Women emerge from war with different experiences, different needs and different perceptions of what they want. What kind of a system would accommodate this diversity? How does feminist analysis inform our justice work? What is the role of reparations? What should be the role of the "post-conflict" state? Where should the emphasis be placed? How do we relate to women who do not want to be part of the broader search for justice – those who simply want to forget and be able to live their lives in relative peace? The route to justice is often thought of only as a legal pursuit at the local, national or international level, but it also needs to include personal dimensions, such as internal healing or reconciliation. Distinctions were made between using a judicial system to seek justice and the notion of justice itself.

Some women are clear that they want the perpetrators to be punished. Other women know what is fair and what is unfair, but are not cognizant of any legal entitlements, nor are they interested in a judicial course of action once they become familiar with the legal process. Many women do not want to confront their perpetrators; they are interested in "peace in our minds." They do not care for apologies from the perpetrator because they question their sincerity. From activists, they ask for support, empathy and a safe space to be themselves. Confidentiality plays an important role because, in front of their families and communities, they often cannot talk about their abuse. They are focused on the future where they want to enjoy a life with dignity and respect for their fundamental rights.

The idea of transitional justice was challenged several times. The term is used to describe issues of justice in the context of a state moving from an armed conflict situation to a state of peace; it includes addressing the harms caused by the conflict and elaborating a plan for initiating peace. In reality, most "post-conflict" states are characterized by less armed conflict, but conflicts of race, gender and class remain. A more apt characterization would be to talk of armed conflict and "less-armed" conflict. Even in "post-conflict," threats to women's safety remain, particularly when they choose to speak out. So what does transitional justice mean for women? At a minimum, the cessation of hostilities and the creation of a safe space for survivors are necessary for any authentic discussion of justice. If women do not feel able to speak out because their lives or livelihoods are threatened, then justice, however it is defined, will not be served.

Sudan



- the largest country in Africa, with an area of 2,500,000 km²
- official languages are English and Arabic, but over 400 other languages and dialects are spoken in Sudan
- total population of 35 million, the majority of whom are Muslim, while parts of the population practice Christianity or animism
- a multicultural society with a mix of ethnic identities that includes Arab, Beja, Dinka, Fur, Nubian, and Nuer
- more than 5 million people are internally displaced, most of whom are women and children

Following the imposition of Sharia Law in 1983, the advances made by the Sudanese women's movement have rapidly deteriorated. More than 80% of Sudanese women are suffering from female genital mutilation (FGM). In 2007, despite celebrating 100 years of access to basic education for girls, the literacy rate for women was less than 40%.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan signed in 2005 ended what was the longest civil war in Africa. This agreement between the north and south addressed wealth and power sharing, self-determination for the south and democratic transformation. It provided the framework for other peace agreements such as the Darfur Peace Agreement and Eastern Sudan.

I want to challenge the notion of justice itself: what do we mean by justice and how is justice defined and continually redefined by the context we are living in?

– Asha El-Karib, Sudan

Many Roundtable participants challenged existing legal notions of justice. The instruments and institutions at local, national and international levels are biased against women, they said. In the case of Sudan for example, at the national level, there are no provisions for recognizing rape or sexual violence; women who speak out are at risk of accusations of adultery, a recognized crime in Sudan under Sharia law. In such cases, the amount of legal reform required for women to be able to access justice is staggering. And in the example of Burma, where the state is actively perpetrating the crime, women who have fled the country have no state to hold accountable.

Judges are usually men appointed by the state. When it is the state that bears responsibility for the systematic nature of sexual violence committed in war, it is the perpetrator who directs the judicial system's response to women's demands.

From a rights-based approach, how can we challenge/hold accountable the governments who are yesterday's perpetrators and should now be prosecuted?

– Sophie Havyarimana, Burundi

There is also the question of who is actually tried – just the men who followed orders? Will men who gave the orders escape with impunity? If our feminist analysis leads us to conclude that legal structures are yet another arena where power imbalances exist, why are we resorting to tinkering with unfair legal systems? What other courses of action can we take?

Some participants worked with women who were both speaking out publicly and engaging in judicial processes. These few high-profile cases were thought of as emblematic and key in ending impunity; they could inspire other women who were unable or unwilling to pursue a similar course – the actions of the few manifesting the courage and pain of the many. Legal justice is understood as retributive justice, as punishment for crimes committed. But it should also be a means to change and transform behaviours in society so that what is acceptable or even celebrated becomes unacceptable. With emblematic cases, what is achieved in the long-term may be a change in the acceptability of

certain behaviours or public perception. This may, in fact, be more substantial than what is achieved for individual survivors engaged in the process. Some women spoke of these emblematic cases as tools that could set legal precedents, lay the foundations for other women's cases to be heard, and for judicial reform.

Even in these contexts where it is possible to pursue legal recourse, there are many obstacles. Finding physical evidence for crimes that occurred decades ago is difficult at best and often impossible. Witnesses who agree to testify against potentially powerful perpetrators may be putting their own safety at risk. Legal processes at any level are slow, time-consuming and expensive. Plaintiffs are constantly in the publicly eye, being asked to defend themselves not only in a court of law but in the court of public opinion as well. They are required to tell their story repeatedly under close scrutiny. Because of this potential for re-victimization, pursuing a legal course of action can have devastating psychosocial consequences, and so informed consent and accompaniment are very important.

The way the justice system currently works, procedures are not respectful of these women, who are forced to expose themselves in many cases to greater questioning than the alleged offenders themselves.

– Claudia Ramírez, Colombia

At a national level, many post-conflict states have organized Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs). These have been controversial. Amnesty is often granted to those who appear before the TRCs; although the truth may be told, perpetrators escape with impunity and many feel that justice is not served. Participants asked: what is more important, peace or justice? This was recognized as a false dichotomy. In fact, there cannot be a lasting peace without justice. TRCs often have a broad mandate and rarely integrate the specific needs of women, a quality that is true of peace negotiations in general. Roundtable participants felt that they needed to learn from one another so that they could shape future TRC processes that can seem monolithic and impenetrable. How can TRCs be infiltrated, infused and influenced by a feminist analysis and agenda?

Some participants had experience with regional and international legal mechanisms such as the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights and the

International Criminal Court, although some countries have yet to sign the Rome Statutes.³ Participants were skeptical about the impacts of international legal processes in the field. Given the obstacles – for example the struggle to have sexual violence in armed conflict recognized as a crime against humanity, or the risk of re-victimizing women who are called to testify a number of times – others were reluctant to engage in these mechanisms but wanted to better understand the processes and pitfalls.

Sexual violence against women during armed conflict is not just a crime; it is a violation of human rights. This can sometimes be more successfully argued at the national and international level, where such cases can be framed as an abuse of political power and a violation of internationally recognized rights. Particularly where national laws are lacking, the international arena can at least give a few women access to justice and give voice to women's experiences, and the crimes perpetrated against them, in front of an international audience. The international legal arena also helped women to pressure their respective governments to integrate international legal norms. One of the main challenges ahead will be to bridge the gap between international legal processes and the national and local realities of women.

For many the role of reparations is essential. It provides compensation that allows women affected by sexual violence during armed conflict to continue their lives. There was discussion of struggles to broaden the concept of reparations beyond monetary compensation, to more integral reparations including public apologies, recognition, and other healing and compensatory processes. However, many questions were also raised. Who receives reparations? Who decides what they will be and how much is enough? Where do the funds and resources come from? What is the political economy of reparations? Do reparations go hand in hand with impunity?

Locally, there are systems outside of formal legal processes to deal with sexual violence. For example, some communities are pursuing justice by traditional means, using a system that respects their culture and context. However, there was much skepticism expressed about traditional justice from Roundtable participants. Some stated bluntly that men preferred traditional processes because they were “absolutely male-dominated” and

³ The Rome statutes establish the court's functions, jurisdiction and structure.

Peru



- a largely mountainous country of 1,285,220 km²
- a multiethnic population of 28 million
- the main spoken language is Spanish, although a significant number of Peruvians speak Quechua and other indigenous languages

During the 1980s and into the 90s, Peru suffered a brutal internal armed conflict, during which hundreds of thousands were displaced, and 70,000 people killed.

According to Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission report released in 2003, most of the dead were indigenous people.

The Truth Commission in Peru was the first in Latin America to contain a full chapter on gender-based violence against women, over 80% of which was perpetrated by the Peruvian Armed Forces. The Report indicated that rape used as a weapon of war by the military and police was systematic and generalized, and that it constituted a crime against humanity.

entailed the punishment of survivors as opposed to perpetrators. Women who have been raped are sometimes judged as adulterers, or assigned to marry their aggressor as part of an amicable settlement. The norms and values inherent in traditional justice systems were seen to reflect traditional patriarchal power, and to limit women's access to justice.

There is a weakness in the rule of law, where the institutions no longer fulfill their purposes of protecting the lives and integrity of women, and instead favour the permanent reproduction of sexual violence. This whole climate ... has forced us in recent months to introduce changes in our strategies to seek justice, and postpone the building of legal cases. Up to what point we can continue to pursue justice without putting the lives of women ... in extreme danger is currently a major dilemma.

– Luz Méndez, Guatemala

Though gains can be made, processes at the local, national, regional and international levels are all fraught with obstacles and frustration. Justice is a complex notion, and the journey for women who seek judicial recourse is a long one.

3.3 Comprehensive Programming: Our Work with Survivors

We need to think about how we support women who have been raped by the military. We can't just give them information and leave; we need to accompany them. There are women who have been raped in refugee camps. Where can they go? Other women have been resettled for their own safety. Where do they find support? There are difficulties in reaching these women.

– Zipporah Sein, Burma

We are refugees, exiled for many years. There were not a lot of women's organizations at the beginning. We needed to deal with the crisis and the needs of the women. We are victims but we are not sitting down and crying; we organized ourselves, we strategized, we educated ourselves, and we formed small groups.

– Nang Lao Liang Won, Burma

In our work methodologies, we can see the strengthening of the abilities of women to respond to challenges in their lives.

– Diana Avila, Peru

All Roundtable participants had an extensive personal history of feminist activism and knowledge of issues related to sexual violence against women in conflict, and all were affiliated with organizations working on this issue in some capacity. Many participants are involved in comprehensive programming strategies with the broad goal of breaking through the silence, changing political and legal institutions, obtaining justice and empowering women who have survived sexual violence during armed conflict.

Programming may encompass training and capacity-building, documentation work, and trust-building so women have an

opportunity to speak when they are ready. It may also include adequate psychosocial accompaniment, sometimes involving professionals in the field, the pursuit of compensation or legal avenues for reparations, seeking legal justice at the domestic, regional or international level, and advocacy campaigns. It may involve more short-term, needs-based, service-oriented approaches or longer-term public awareness campaigns. Key in all programming is the transformation of women survivors from victims to agents of change, in some capacity, so that they are better positioned to exercise control over their lives and able to begin a reconciliation with the past. Some participants felt that political progress had been made in their national contexts in some areas, while others, particularly in Colombia, Burma and Sudan where active conflict still exists, felt that they were still fighting an uphill battle.

Many programming efforts include public awareness-raising and advocacy. This is a central issue because the transformation of patriarchal societies requires a broad change in attitudes. Sexual violence is not just about the women who have survived, but about everyone around them as well. The role of media in framing armed conflict can exacerbate and encourage brutality, and also portray women exclusively as victims. In its worst incarnation, it is propagandist and dehumanizing; it supports the construction of an Other, an enemy, fuelling hatred. It is critical to influence the media to portray images in ways that allocate power to the women affected.

Key in all programming is the transformation of women survivors from victims to agents of change, in some capacity, so that they are better positioned to exercise control over their lives and able to begin a reconciliation with the past.

When organizations and activists work with women survivors, there can be a divide between the survivors and allies who are working with them. The latter may not have suffered abuses of the same scale or faced the same discrimination and oppression. Roundtable participants wondered how they could best work with survivors, including the most marginalized in society. How can we increase our sensitivity and connect to women on the ground without labelling them as passive

victims? How do we position ourselves and on whose behalf do we speak? How can we be fair to the women we work with and ourselves? How do we avoid creating a divide

between “us” and “them”? These questions reflect the genuine desire of activists to acknowledge the differences between them and the women survivors they work with, but also to try and bridge those differences through greater understanding.

Many participants in the Roundtable articulated the importance of working with survivors and survivor organizations to strengthen their capacities. How much do we really support the capacities of local organizations that encourage women to organize and associate? How much do we support local groups comprised of survivors themselves? How are survivors seen by other women, by their communities and their peers? Though a comprehensive programming approach sounds inviting, the reality of the capacity of NGOs may be different. Without a strong survivors’ movement at the base, there’s little that can be done.

Although they live in very militarized societies, in conflict or post-conflict, and although they experience high levels of sexual violence, women can often assert their own agency and become political actors. There is an apparent contradiction when women who suffer physical harm begin to act and to propose alternatives – most people do not think of victims as political actors. But this is not a rare phenomenon; the pain and trauma of being subjected to sexual violence during armed conflict can trigger a transformative process. Women who are victimized can become political agents. For some, becoming politicized and active is an effective strategy in combating victimization and trauma, though women

Canada



- the second largest country in the world, with an area of 9,984,670 km²
- total population of 33 million
- French and English are the two official languages

One in three Canadian women have been sexually assaulted. In 2002 alone, there were over 133,000 reported sexual assaults. This represents one assault every four minutes.

Although indigenous women represent only 3% of the Canadian population, they are over-represented as victims of racialized, sexualized violence. The Native Women's Association of Canada estimates that in the past 20 years, at least 500 indigenous women have gone missing in communities across Canada.

will express this politicization in different ways. Furthermore, the long process of accessing justice can change women – they may tell their stories differently as they become more political in their perspectives.

Interestingly, space often opens up for women during war when men become absent. If power, resources, and values are controlled by men, then they are the ones defining norms as well as the consequences for defying those norms. The death of men during war and their long absences from community life can play a role in redefining patriarchal power, to a certain extent. Suddenly, women play more influential roles and there are opportunities for social change. The paradox of conflict is that it can both reinforce patriarchal structures and help break them down. How can feminist movements strengthen the transformative potential of such spaces?

The transformation of women from victim to political actor is a personal journey for those involved, but it can also be reflected in organizational structures. By meeting, building trust, and eventually speaking about their experiences, women may resolve to build an organization for themselves to facilitate their activism. They may also foster a culture within an existing organization conducive to addressing their needs.

Participants did however identify some significant strategic challenges to maintaining effective program-

ming. The increasing technification of international cooperation may have a depoliticizing effect on programming related to sexual violence against women in armed conflict. International cooperation is important as a manifestation of solidarity as well as for mobilizing resources for important programs. However, the emphasis on results and the accompanying quantification of indicators can detract from the more

For survivors, documentation and research with an appropriate methodological approach can be part of a profound transformative process in and of itself.

long-term goal of societal transformation and the dismantling of patriarchal structures. We need to continue to challenge power relations within society without being distracted or derailed by the

minutiae of results-based management and log-frames.

Civil society has played a large role in orienting and supporting existing programs. However, not all civil society organizations approach the issue in the same way. For example, historically, in many Latin American contexts, there have been tensions between human rights organizations and women's groups. For the former, sexual violence during armed conflict was incidental to the entirety of the violations which occurred; it was just one small part. Women's organizations felt that the issue was central to the state's control over their lives. Those who denounced sexual violence were accused of depoliticizing other aspects of the conflict, and those who didn't were accused of being too patriarchal. Progress has been made in many countries to overcome

these divisions and build strong alliances between different organizations and movements.

Similarly, indigenous groups and feminist organizations have clashed around the issue of sexual violence, where the notion of respect for culture can result in women's concerns taking a back seat. Indigenous women face a broader marginalization by virtue of their gender and their race. On another level, indigenous women may have their own methodologies for healing and justice, which can be supported.

4. The Role of Research

One challenge we face is the need for deepening of reflection on, knowledge of and approaches to the multiple oppressions that women survivors of sexual violence face. Particular attention is required to the intersection of ethnic oppression or racism which coexist with the oppression on the basis of gender in the lives of women, who in addition live in conditions of extreme poverty.

– Luz Méndez, Guatemala

Research plays an important role in challenging sexual violence against women in armed conflict, providing valuable information on its widespread use, as well as analytical frameworks that guide more practical work. But there is difficulty in using existing research – it is often out of context, in foreign languages, and of little use for community organizers.

The challenge in conducting research lies in translating what we know conceptually into a concrete and practical research project. Many participants said that the question of research was a relatively new one for them personally, and for their organizations. Consequently, they face methodological and conceptual barriers and lack the tools to resolve these sorts of dilemmas – for instance, the question of how we address the method-

ological barrier between private and public violence and try to link it conceptually to patriarchy and power relations. Most organizations also see their work on sexual violence as a multidisciplinary undertaking. Working with legal experts, psychosocial specialists, human rights and women's advocates, and others – all with diverse approaches and perspectives – is a challenge. For example, the Gender Centre for Research and Training, in Sudan, having documented the stories of women from Darfur, were at a loss as to what to do with these stories. They wanted to know how they could analyze and use examples from the lives of these women without betraying their trust or instrumentalizing them, without facilitating their further objectification. For survivors, documentation and research with an appropriate methodological approach can be part of a profound transformative process in and of itself. How can this enabling approach be encouraged?

For example, *Actoras de Cambio*⁴ developed a methodology of uncovering historical memory, helping unearth women's agency. The investigation began in May 2005 with the objective of highlighting the life histories of women who were raped during the armed conflict – their pain, experiences and struggles. The investigation sought to bring the voices of women into the project of

rebuilding the historical memory of Guatemala. In addition, it took account of the transformations that *Actoras de Cambio* had catalyzed among women. It

**The power of documentation
was echoed by our Burmese counterparts.
Not only was the process empowering for women,
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political scene.**

analyzed how these healing and empowerment processes had created enabling conditions for women to move from being victims to being agents of change, in control of their own history and involved in struggles for justice, changing the conditions of life for all women. The power of documentation was echoed by our Burmese counterparts, who reflected on the experience of preparing "Licence to Rape," a report documenting the systematic use of sexual violence by the Burmese military.⁵ Not only was the process empowering for women, it had a reverberating effect on the international political scene.

⁴ *Actoras de Cambio* is a consortium of a women's organization (the National Union of Guatemalan Women, UNAMG) and a human rights and mental health organization (Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Team, ECAP).

⁵ *Licence to Rape*, www.shanwomen.org

Other participants spoke of the contribution of feminist thought to their conceptual analysis of sexual violence in armed conflict. They spoke about research done by activists in social movements that included women's groups, indigenous peoples' organizations and human rights groups. Some organizations had participated in skills-building processes and programs, accompanied survivors, and helped them locate appropriate psycho-social support. Despite the obstacles, they have been able to engage in a methodological approach that has worked for their circumstances. Roundtable participants felt the need to probe research gaps and spend more time looking at the question of how to approach sexual violence methodologically, conceptually and practically.

Potential areas of research were identified:

- Country-specific research using a feminist analysis and methodology to strengthen understandings of violence against women and program interventions.

How do we better understand the silence of women? How should we interpret this silence – what do we do with it? If it comes from a place of fear or stigma, how can we change those emotions and labels?

- Country-specific research on perceptions of sexuality according to culture, socio-economic status, gender and age, with a focus on indigenous cultures.

How is sexuality perceived and used in society? How does it serve patriarchy and how can sexual norms be transformed? What is the connection between sexuality and sexual violence?

- Documenting stories and memories of women survivors of sexual violence using a feminist methodology.
- Collaborative research on how issues of sexual violence are integrated into truth, justice and reparations processes.

Can we produce a guide that includes methodologies for integrating the needs of women in peace processes? How do we expand the reference tools that have already been developed? Considering the language barriers, how do we promote the sharing of

experiences with peace processes, TRCs, and programs for supporting women across different contexts?

- Collaborative feminist research to compare patterns of sexual violence within different contexts and deepen understanding of context-specific issues.

How can we promote feminist research with an inter-disciplinary approach that uses different points of entry – work with the community, legal systems, media, etc.?

- Sexual violence against men and homophobic violence during armed conflict, including looking at how this violence relates to and differs from violence against women.
- Research on the perpetrators to strengthen knowledge about their understanding and perception of the causes and impacts of the use of sexual violence.

What gives a perpetrator the legitimacy, the power or the excuse to use sexual violence as a weapon in war?

- Research to better understand the broad continuum of violence against women in specific contexts.

How do we dismantle the methodological barrier between the private and the public, and link violence against women conceptually to patriarchy and to power relations? Can we articulate how sexual violence outside of war translates into a weapon during war?

- Redefined feminist research tools to reflect race and class analysis, and an exploration of tools to work on this issue with men.
- An exploration of the definition of concepts of justice from women's perspectives in various countries.

5. Future Directions for Practice

Increasingly, the women with whom we work want to move forward with legal processes with the aim of obtaining justice. This has been a central objective of our work. However the climate of insecurity, the threats and attacks against human rights defenders ... the growing criminality and violence against women, including sexual violence, have worsened ... In many

cases, the accused, former military personnel, former civilian patrols, or former soldiers live in the same communities or in nearby communities where the women who are taking forward these actions live.

– Luz Méndez, Guatemala

How do we avoid the cycle of violence against women in diverse cultural contexts marked by exclusion, while at the same time accomplishing more significant changes in the relations of power between men and women?

– Iliana Estabridis, Peru

We want to build strong alliances among women's groups as well as with male-dominated political groups.

– Nang Lao Liang Won, Burma

A challenge for us has been how to promote an effective international campaign to fight sexual violence while protecting the interests of women survivors on the ground.

– Nang Lao Liang Won, Burma

All Roundtable participants felt it was important to identify future directions as a means to conclude their reflections and thoughts. There were hopes expressed that the process begun in Ottawa would continue and that learning be transformed into tangible outcomes.

Participants expressed the following needs and concerns in regard to their practice:

- **The time and space for reflection:** The sheer volume and intensity of work on sexual violence against women leaves little time for dedicated discussion and reflection among peers. It was clear that there is a need for opportunities that allow time and space to think about what various groups and survivors themselves have been doing, how they've been doing it, and whether they can do it better. How do we refine, deepen and even redefine our own notion of feminism in order to apply these ideas conceptually and practically to our work? Participants also called for more opportunities to critically analyze their accomplishments.
- **International women's solidarity:** Many participants felt the absence of a strong, cohesive global women's movement, a space where they could exchange ideas, offer experiences and engage in joint campaigns. Building a feminist solidarity was identified as an important task, one

also fraught with challenges. From a Southern perspective, what can be expected from feminist organizations in the North? What is their role and how is it perceived?

- **Alliances with other movements:** Not only have there been few alliances with other movements, but outright tension and competition for scarce resources and public acknowledgement exist. Participants called for a more concerted effort on their part, and on the part of feminist organizations, to reach out and link with human rights movements, indigenous movements, those involved in international cooperation efforts, and others.
- **Comprehensive programs:** Although many participants work for and with organizations that have set up multidisciplinary and comprehensive programs, for others, this is still a very big challenge. Due to contextual, political or resource-related issues, an approach that addresses multiple elements with survivors (capacity-building, psycho-social accompaniment, access to justice, public awareness-raising and advocacy) at various levels can be elusive. Women emerge from war with different experiences, different needs and different perceptions of what they want. What kinds of approaches would accommodate this diversity?
- **Working with men:** Many questions were raised about how women activists could work with men, including armed actors, and transform them into agents of change. The larger project of dismantling patriarchy, including work on sexual violence, will not be wholly successful if it includes only women survivors, women activists and women's groups. There is also a need for men to talk with men about violence against women.
- **Security situation:** Conflict and post-conflict situations present distinct but equally challenging security issues. Women asked how the security situation could be addressed. Survivors and activists commonly face reprisals and the threat of reprisals.
- **Accountability:** Women's experiences have shown that even in the rare cases where perpetrators are held to account, consequences are often limited to the soldiers who followed orders. How do we successfully demand accountability from those

higher up in the chain of command – those who gave the orders?

- **Achieving justice:** Women who have sought justice through official, legal means have found national, regional and international systems and procedures extremely onerous. Often these systems favour the state. Legal reforms are clearly necessary, despite the involved and bureaucratic nature of the change process. How can we engage women inside the system, judges and lawyers, those with expertise and knowledge in this effort? Meanwhile, how can space be created for women under existing mechanisms? Are there alternative justice tools that could be accessed? How can we shape Truth Commission processes so that they are not so onerous? What would a feminist analysis of legal and judicial mechanisms reveal? How can we develop alternative mechanisms for achieving justice, from women's point of view? How can women who cannot access the state, such as refugees, demand justice? What do we mean by justice and how is justice defined and continually redefined by the context we are living in?
- **International cooperation:** It is critical that the place of local civil society be recognized by the international donor community. Local women's organizations, for example, are essential to organizing and advocacy work that may input into larger international processes and campaigns. And yet these local organizations are often the most marginalized, either because they are targeted by governments and other armed actors, or dismissed by the larger international actors in the aid industry.
- **Transformation of patriarchy:** Where do we begin? How can feminist movements help build a space that is more transformative? How can feminist men, male society at large and armed factions who have been perpetrators be engaged in a way that begins to fundamentally shift the balance of power?
- **Analysis of race and class:** What are the existing conceptual and practical methodologies required to incorporate race and class into an analysis of sexual violence against women in armed conflict, as well as violence against women more broadly? Where are the gaps? Issues of culture, for example, are raised in discussions of sexuality, and tend to

create tension. Indigenous women can bring a great deal of controversy to debates of more mainstream women's organizations by challenging notions of indigenosity and privilege. How can we support indigenous women's efforts? How do we engage with all women – cognizant of race, class, or ethnicity – on this issue in a unifying way?

6. Conclusion

The Roundtable created a space to think analytically and strategically about the work of ending sexual violence against women in armed conflict, and in everyday life. Participants were navigating many tensions:

- Speaking about sexual violence, isolating it from other forms of violence, while also wanting to situate it within a continuum of violence against women.
- Focusing on violence against women during or after armed conflict, recognizing the problems that exist in treating these two issues as separate.
- Recognizing the importance of individual women's healing, while also encouraging women to invest in long-term, emblematic legal cases that have the potential to inspire people to seek justice and lay the basis for legal reform.
- Recognizing the need to protect the security of women survivors as much as possible, to facilitate their search for justice and the challenges and obstacles this represents.
- Navigating multiple and simultaneous strategies at the international, regional, national and local levels.
- Challenging the patriarchal nature of traditional justice systems, while also recognizing the need for culturally specific and community-led initiatives.
- Acknowledging the paradox of conflict and seeing how it both reinforces and breaks down patriarchal power.

In finding our way through these tensions, the understanding that violence against women is expressed along a continuum was central. Participants approached their work as specific actions towards the elimination of violence against women and the transformation of the patriarchal societies in which we live.

Annex 1: Participants to the Roundtable

Sexual Violence Against Women in Armed Conflict

September 9-10, 2007

Ottawa

Diana Avila is a Peruvian journalist and sociologist who has studied at the Catholic University of Lima, Peru and Essex University in Colchester, United Kingdom. Diana has been a human rights activist since the late eighties, working for example with the Institute for Legal Defense in Peru, creating and consolidating the magazine *Ideele* and producing their annual human rights reports. At the time of her participation, Diana was the Executive Director of **Project Counselling Service** since 1999, and prior to that was PCS Counsellor for the Andean region from 1992 to 1999.

Caroline Boudreau has worked with various refugee organizations in Canada, Asia and the Middle East. She has also been involved with different human rights groups. She is part of the Inter Pares Africa team.

Karen Cocq is part of the Inter Pares Latin America team with specific responsibility for Central America and Mexico. She has worked, traveled and lived in many parts of Latin America, and has devoted many years to social justice activism and political organizing abroad and in Canada.

Asha El-Karib was the Chair of the **Gender Centre for Research and Training**, based in Khartoum, which works for women's equality, peace and democracy, and a better understanding of how women's unequal status has been exacerbated by the long-standing armed conflict in Sudan. Working in partnership with other women's organizations and pro-democracy groups, the Centre is committed to building a strong social movement able to influence policy and advocate for women's rights and social inclusion.

Iliana Estabridis

Nadia Faucher supports the work of Inter Pares in Latin America and more particularly in Colombia and Peru. She has worked and lived in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. She is also supporting the work of Ottawa-based women's centers offering services to women subjected to sexual violence.

María Ysabel Cedano García, a feminist human rights activist beginning in the 90's, lawyer, diploma in Gender studies, Masters degree in political sciences from PUCP, director of DEMUS, studies in women's rights, Coordinator of the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for Women's Rights – Peru, member of the Peruvian Focal Point for the September 28 Campaign for the Legalization of Abortion, member of the Independent Lesbian Socialist Feminist collective. She has published articles and studies on women's human rights, particularly related to the right to a life without violence, sexual and reproductive rights and other social rights. In her recent activism she has been working alongside colleagues on the issue of memory, justice and reparation for women who suffered sexual violence during the armed conflict.

Rachel Gouin has dedicated a number of years to promoting social justice for girls and young women in Canada. A writer and activist, she is a member of the fundraising and donor relations team at Inter Pares.

Fahima A. Hashim is Director of **Salmmah Women's Resource Centre**, based in Khartoum. She was a feminist activist in New Delhi, India, from 1999-2001, and was very much inspired by the Indian women's movement. Salmmah's mission is to empower women by providing information and skills based on scientific research on feminism, violence against women, and sexuality. Salmmah plays a leading role in research, documentation and dissemination of knowledge and information on women and human rights in Sudan.

Sophie Havyarimana is the Burundi country director at the **Agency for Cooperation in Research and Development (ACORD)**. ACORD collaborates with African and Northern organizations to mobilize resources and support for local economic and social development, research and training, as well as advocacy for more equitable relations within and among communities. ACORD has extensive experience in areas of conflict in Africa. Sophie is part of the Burundi human rights movement, particularly active on issues of women's rights, and has contributed since 2005 to national and regional discussions of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

Nang Lao Liang Won is a feminist, activist and academic. Currently, she is the Coordinator of the Women Against Violence Program and the Information, Documentation & Research Department for the **Women's League of Burma (WLB)**. WLB is an umbrella organization comprising twelve women's organizations of different ethnic backgrounds from Burma; it was created in 1999 to increase the participation of all women from Burma in the struggle for peace, democracy and human rights. Nang Lao Liang Won lectures at the Women's Studies Center, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Thailand. She is co-founder of the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) and remains an Advisory Team Member.

Christina Laur is currently the Coordinator of the Human Rights Program of the Central America and Mexico Office of the Project Counseling Service (PCS). She worked for the Centro para La Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (Centre for Legal Action on Human Rights – CALDH) in Guatemala from 2000 to 2006 as the Sub-Director and previously as the Coordinator of their Program for Justice and Reconciliation. She was Director of International Fundraising in the Association Ak' Tenamit from 1998-99 and Project Officer with the Canadian Foundation for the Americas in Ottawa, Canada from 1993 to 1998. Christina has her Masters in Political Science from the University of Guelph and a Bachelors degree in Social Sciences from the University of Ottawa.

Luz Méndez was the coordinator of the **Agents for Change Consortium**, which was, at the time, comprised of two Guatemalan NGOs, UNAMG (National Union of Guatemalan Women), and ECAP (Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Group). The consortium was created to support women survivors of sexual violence

during the armed conflict in Guatemala in their search for healing and justice. Luz is a member of the National Council for the Implementation of the Peace Accords, as an elected representative of Guatemalan women's organizations. A member of the advisory council of the Global Fund for Women, Luz advocates internationally for the full participation of women in peace processes.

Rita Morbia has lived in southern Africa and has a background in environmental activism. She works at Inter Pares and her program responsibilities are in Asia.

Claudia Paz

Claudia Ramirez is a lawyer specializing in human rights and public law. She is employed as Sub director of Corporación Sisma Mujer. Director of the program for justice and violence against women. She has experience as a consultant in human rights with an emphasis on the rights of women. She is a researcher, teacher and facilitator of training processes on the theme of justice and gender and women's rights, international humanitarian law and training on themes of political and social participation.

Samantha Sams is currently Regional Coordinator for **Project Counselling Service's** office for Central America and México. Formerly Coordinator of PCS's Human Rights Program. Holds a Master's degree in Latin American Studies (sociology and political science) from the University of London, England and a BA in English Literature from Queen's University, Canada. A feminist, social researcher and human rights activist, Samantha has lived in Guatemala for 11 years, working in local and international organizations and participating in the struggle against violence and impunity.

Maria Eugenia Sanchez is a feminist and a sociologist specialized in municipal affairs. She has worked for 25 years at the *casa de la Mujer*, a women's centre where she has worked on themes such as violence against women, human rights, advocacy, and democracy seen from women's perspective. She has taken part in various national consultations and has spoken at national and international events on the themes of violence against women, peacebuilding, and democracy. She is currently coordinating the advocacy program at *Casa de la Mujer*, where she is developing policy positions and pressure tactics with diverse social and political actors. Maria Eugenia is also a member of the *Coordinación Nacional*

de la Ruta Pacífica de las mujeres, a national women's organization. She has also been a professor in public management.

Zipporah Sein was the Executive Secretary of the **Karen Women's Organization (KWO)** at the time of her participation. A member of the Women's League of Burma, KWO seeks to maintain the dignity of Karen women and rebuild the bonds of community solidarity that the Burmese army has sought to destroy. KWO assists women through vocational training, nursery schools, leadership training, resources for new mothers in refugee camps, and care and support for women who have suffered torture and physical and sexual abuse. In 2004, KWO released *Shattering Silences*, a report documenting the Burmese army's use of rape as a strategy of war in Karen state. The report was launched at the United Nations Human Rights Commission to focus international attention on the situation of women in Karen State, Burma.

Kimberly Stanton is Country Representative for Colombia for the **Project Counselling Service**, an international non-governmental cooperation agency that works with internally displaced and war-affected populations. She holds a doctorate in political science from the University of Chicago, specializing in comparative politics and democratic theory. She began her career in state government, has taught at the university level, and worked for several years as a researcher and program officer at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, with responsibility for grant-making in support of the peace processes in Central America, on U.S.-Cuba relations, and on international governance and human rights. She subsequently served as human rights program director at the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, and as Deputy Director and Director of Studies at the Washington Office on Latin America. She has consulted for several foundations and for the Inter-American Development Bank. She is a member of the Latin American Studies Association and Women in International Security.

Jean Symes supports Inter Pares' Latin America program with specific responsibility for Peru and Colombia. Her past experience includes human rights promotion and monitoring, social policy development, and financial planning.

Giulia Tamayo (Peru, 1958). From 2005 to 2007, she was a member of the International Committee on Policy (ICP) of Amnesty International. She is currently responsible for Research and Policies at Amnesty International, Spain. Between 2000 and 2007, she was responsible for the Campaigns and Research department of Amnesty International, Spain. From October 2003 to April 2004, she was a consultant for the International Secretariat of Amnesty International for sexual violence during the armed conflict in Colombia. She has been responsible for investigating and documenting violations of human rights of Peruvian women, as well as drafting reports on violence against women and impact of armed conflict on women in Latin America, while working with Flora Tristan (women's centre) 1984-1998 and CLADEM (Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer) 1987-2000. She was awarded the Ginetta Sagan price in 2000 by Amnesty International, North America.

Lawyer, with a degree in Law from the Pontificia Universidad Católica, Peru, doctoral study and diploma in advance studies (DEA) in fundamental rights (International Public Law) at the Universidad Carlos III, Madrid.

Rebecca Wolsak supports the work of Inter Pares in Asia, in particular in relation to Burma. She spent five years living and working on Burma's borders and returned to Canada to work with Inter Pares.

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ISBN 978-0-9781200-3-0