

**Ending Militarized Violence against Women:  
No Women, No Just Peace and Security**

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As this paper is being written, it is one week into an international campaign called “16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women.” This annual international campaign, from 25 November, International Day against Violence against Women, through 10 December, International Human Rights Day, originated in 1991 from the first Women’s Global Leadership Institute at the Center for Women’s Global Leadership, Rutgers University, and has spread across the global.

The theme guiding the 2011 campaign is militarism and violence against women. As the campaign website states:

“[W]e hope this year’s theme describes the complex relationship between peace, home, and the world, and recognizes the many spaces where militarism influences our lives. Therefore, the 2011 theme slogan will be: From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let’s Challenge Militarism and End Violence Against Women!” (Retrieved from <http://16dayscwg.l.rutgers.edu/2011-campaign/theme-announcement>).

The particular emphasis is an important shift in the global movement against violence against women. Violence against women has generally come to be accepted as a widespread problem facing all societies worldwide. The prevailing view conceptualizes the problem as primarily interpersonal and occurring in the private sphere. Less attention has been focused on militarized violence—committed by both state and non-state actors—that has ravaged communities on an unimaginable scale, with the two most dramatic exceptions being Bosnia in 1990s and more recently the DRC. Much less is known outside a relatively small circle of directly affected people, researchers, and aid workers/organizations about the frequency, regularity, and systematic and systemic features, and manifestations of the phenomenon that range from single rape of civilian by a state actor in Japan and Korea, to massive and systematic sexual violence as a weapon of war in Liberia and Sierra Leone by various warring factions and UN Peacekeepers. Moreover, in locations not generally conceived as militarized, like Niger Delta and Ghanaian marketplaces, women are sexually violated and otherwise harassed by national military, private security guards, and armed militia groups. The level and nature of militarization and military violence in these areas represented by participants in the proposed conference are often invisible to outsiders or justified as “collateral damage” done in the name of national and local “security.” However, rather than collateral, the harm done in these settings is horrific and enduring, with lasting trauma for survivors and their families and high levels of insecurity for entire communities and regions.

Due to the long and extensive organizing and advocacy work of many individual women and women’s organizations globally, military violence against women has been taken up as part of worldwide humanitarian crisis. Due in large part to pressure from women’s groups at their legal allies, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Forearm Yugoslavia declared rape and sexual

assault during armed conflicts as a war crime and crimes against humanity in recognition of the massive and systematic rape and sexual assaults on Muslim Bosnian women during the war. This marked an important turning point for the ant-violence movement because the ruling brought full attention to a crisis that has not been recognized as such. Subsequent passage of several key international resolutions by the UN Security Council, such as UNSCRs 1325 and 1820, collectively referred to as “Women, Peace, and Security,” have legitimized the problem at global level.

Although the legal victories indeed are very significant achievements, there is a gap between actions at the international level and their implementation. In many cases, the bodies responsible for implementation have not been as responsive to concerns of women thus have not included them in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. Moreover, women and communities most directly affected often do not know these mechanisms exist.

Other forms of violence also severely impact women’s lives during armed conflict and in militarized conditions. The economic and social impacts, conceptualized as violence against women, are very significant but not adequately recognized and addressed post-conflict, as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and post-conflict reconstruction programs are typically not gender-sensitive beyond the most obvious aspects (see article by Mama and Okazawa-Rey in the conference publication for details).

As the nature and operations of war and armed conflict and the forms of militarization shift, there is a need for systematic examination and analysis from the ground and for updating existing mechanisms to keep them relevant and useful and to devise other creative strategies for addressing impacts of war on women—those most severely impacted and most burdened with protecting and supporting their families and communities. As numerous feminist scholars and activists has argued, if women’s experiences continue to be marginalized, there cannot be just and sustainable post-war communities and societies.