

Continuing the Journey  
**ending sexual  
violence in conflict**



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EVERY CHILD FREE FROM FEAR

# continuing the journey ending sexual violence in conflict

## INTRODUCTION

Rape and sexual violence in conflict are crimes that show no mercy or discrimination. Little girls are sexually abused. The breasts of nursing mothers are hacked off. Teenage boys are forced to rape their grandmothers. Women are gang raped publicly. Men are castrated. The list goes on.

Sexual violence can happen to anyone. Age and gender are no barrier. Nor is what you do or who you are. You can be a priest, a soldier, a mother or a newborn and still be brutally sexually assaulted. And just as survivors of sexual violence can be anyone, so too can the perpetrators.

*Disclaimer: Photos in this publication are illustrative and do not represent survivors of sexual violence unless identified as such.*



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It is not just armed rebels or the military that commit sexual crimes. Assailants can be family members or a neighbour you have lived next door to all your life. They can be doctors who have saved countless lives or peacekeepers that brought hope of security with them. During the chaos of conflict, aggressors can be almost anyone.

And when anyone can be sexually violated and anyone can violate, seemingly with impunity, lives and communities break down. Survivors of rape and sexual violence face medical, psychological and economic challenges, which can also affect their families. They are often severely stigmatised socially, as are the children born of rape. When survivors do not have the right kind of support, the cost of seeking justice outweighs its benefits and perpetrators remain free. Grievances can deepen and communities fracture. Ceasefires break and conflicts endure. The impact of sexual violence is devastating and far-reaching.

Preventing and bringing an end to sexual violence in conflict is critical not just for the countries affected, but critically also for world peace and security. Supporting survivors, breaking the taboos around wartime rape and creating a culture of zero tolerance against perpetrators is vital to enable individuals, societies and countries traumatised by conflict to heal, find peace, grow and move on.

The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2014 marked a turning point in the fight against sexual violence in conflict, and should be applauded. However, it takes more than declarations and commitments to end sexual violence. Sexual violence in conflict continues: Girls in northern Nigeria have been taken from their homes and schools by Boko Haram and used as sex slaves. Boys and men in detention in Syria still face sexual violence as a form of torture. Islamic State continues to capture women, forcing them to have children for fighters. In Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Colombia and countless other countries, women and girls, boys and men are still raped. This is why we must keep up the momentum to end sexual violence in conflict, keep a light shining on it and not rest until sexual violence in conflict exists only in the past.

**Cover image:** Conflict rape victim stands next to graffiti drawing of a man at the Mama Masika shelter for conflict rape victims in Minova, the DRC. The shelter has served more than 7000 men, women and children.

**Pictured left:** (left) Of the 8 million people displaced by Syria's war, more than half are children. They arrive in neighbouring countries with little more than the clothes on their backs and memories of friends and home. (right) A Syrian refugee woman hangs wet clothes between two huts at the Azraq Refugee Camp.

# THE 2014 GLOBAL SUMMIT TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

From 10th to 13th June, 2014, government representatives from over 125 countries, more than 900 experts, faith leaders, youth delegates and representatives from civil society, the United Nations, African Union and European Union came to London with the shared objectives of:

- Strengthening accountability and bringing more perpetrators to justice;
- Providing greater comprehensive support and assistance for survivors;
- Ensuring that ending sexual and gender-based violence is at the heart of peace and security efforts and policies.<sup>1</sup>

The Summit saw commitments to:

- Reform legal systems and frameworks and work with legislators, magistrates, judiciary, police, prosecutors and lawyers so that sexual violence in conflict is recognised and prosecuted effectively – whether that crime is committed against women and girls, men or boys.
- Improve documentation, investigations and reparations to put survivors' rights, needs and safety first.
- Take responsibility at the highest levels to make certain armed forces do not use sexual violence.
- Ensure that protection and support services are comprehensive, coordinated, rapid and accessible – responding to medical, psychological, social, housing and economic and housing issues – and centred around the specific needs of each individual survivor; appropriate to their gender, age and faith.
- Make sure child victims receive support that prioritises their acceptance and reintegration with their families and communities so they can go to school, be seen by doctors and resume their childhoods.
- Address the stigma attached to sexual violence, for survivors and children born of rape.

The above is just a snapshot of the actions agreed at the Summit. For more details, visit: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/390742/PSVI\\_post\\_summit\\_report\\_Online2.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390742/PSVI_post_summit_report_Online2.pdf)

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<sup>1</sup> Summit Report, The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict London, 2014.



**Pictured above:** World Vision hosted a side event on 'The Journey of a Survivor' at the Summit, bringing together survivors and those working with survivors from Uganda, Kosovo, Lebanon, the DRC and the International Criminal Court.



# DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE 2014 SUMMIT

The momentum created and the commitments made by governments and practitioners from all over the globe to finally end sexual violence in conflict gave hope to millions. In just a year, demonstrable progress has been made in a number of countries to hold perpetrators accountable and ensure that survivors of sexual violence receive comprehensive support and assistance.

Below are a few highlights of the progress and milestones reached to date.

## 1. Legislation, doctrine and enforcement

- In Croatia, the Government passed a bill which will compensate survivors of sexual violence during the Bosnian War in the 1990s. The bill (still to be passed by the Croatian parliament) entitles survivors to a one-off payment of €20,000 and monthly sums of €320.
- The Government of South Sudan signed a communiqué that clearly prohibited “acts of rape, sexual abuse and torture” by the military and police, denied impunity to perpetrators of sexual violence and offered support services for survivors. Opposition leader Riek Machar then issued a communiqué in which he committed to undertake similar measures.
- The leader of the United Self Defence Forces of Colombia and 11 other senior commanders were found guilty of war atrocities, including 175 cases of sexual and gender-based violence through the Peace and Justice Tribunal. They were ordered to compensate 9,500 victims and issue a public apology.

## 2. Involving survivors in peace talks

- The Colombian Government invited sexual violence survivors to peace negotiations between themselves and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Held in Havana, Cuba, in September 2014, 60 survivors addressed and shared their experiences with delegates at the peace talks. A gender sub-committee was also created to ensure gender perspectives were considered during the negotiations.

**Pictured left:** Charlotte (name changed) was raped by two soldiers during the ongoing conflict in the DRC. She soon fell pregnant and was able to escape when she was five months pregnant. Her family rejected her and she is now living with her son in a women’s refuge for survivors of sexual violence.

## CASE STUDY: THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The DRC received prominent attention at the 2014 Summit. The Government's participation included a commitment to implement the national strategy to combat sexual violence.

It is important to note some key steps taken since the 2014 Summit, as well as challenges that remain:

- In July 2014, Jeanine Mabunda was appointed as Presidential Advisor on Sexual Violence and Recruitment of Children. Her role involves working with military leaders to improve action to prevent sexual violence by the armed forces, hold perpetrators to account and to strengthen collaboration between stakeholders to improve support and services available to survivors.
- In September 2014, the national army of the DRC (Forces Armées de la République Democratique du Congo, or FARDC) adopted an action plan to combat sexual violence and a commission to look at the issue. In March 2015, FARDC military commanders signed a declaration to combat sexual violence. A pledge to be taken by every commander serving in the FARDC requires them to respect human rights and international law related to sexual violence, and take direct action against soldiers under their command implicated in sexual violence.<sup>2</sup>
- In November 2014, the FARDC Military Court convicted General Jerome Katwavu to ten years' imprisonment for crimes including conflict-related sexual violence. 25 other FARDC and Police Nationale Congolaise were also convicted of rape.<sup>3</sup> Former FARDC Lieutenant Colonel Bedi Mobuli Engagela, 'Colonel 106' was convicted of crimes against humanity in December 2014.<sup>4</sup>
- Ms Mabunda launched a national toll-free hotline in November 2014, providing medical and legal assistance to survivors of sexual violence from trained counselors, accompanied by a campaign to raise awareness of the hotline.

Despite this progress, there are still many challenges. The different "pillars" of the action plan (prevention and protection, ending impunity and providing

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/drc-military-pledge-marks-milestone-on-road-to-ending-conflict-related-sexual-violence/> ; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hague-and-jolie-welcome-drc-army-action-plan-on-sexual-violence>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/office-of-personal-representative-welcomes-sexual-violence-conviction-of-high-ranking-general-in-drc-300005268.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/recent-convictions-of-military-and-police-officials-in-drc-send-clear-message-that-impunity-for-sexual-violence-in-conflict-will-not-be-tolerated/>

support to survivors) are approached separately. More could be done to look at implementation from a survivor's perspective and work across these "pillars."

Justice moves slowly and many perpetrators still walk free – either they are never arrested or released following arrest. The justice system suffers with delays, a lack of trained staff and survivor confidentiality. While mobile courts mean survivors do not have to travel great distances to participate in court cases, they also increase the potential for further stigmatisation: as the survivors can be seen entering these courts and sessions are reportedly not always closed.

In communities, a strong tendency to blame victims remains, which further hampers justice and accountability. Many survivors face stigma and lose everything, leading to a vicious circle where they cannot earn a living and suffer further stigma as a result. More attention is also needed to help adolescent girls in particular return to school.

Focused efforts supported by additional resources from Government and others must continue in the DRC. But sexual violence needs to be addressed within wider reforms. If not, survivors risk being further ostracised if they are seen by some to be getting special treatment.

### 3. Building investigation and documentation capacity

- Since launching the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict at the Summit in 2014, the UK Government has supported implementation by: running training programmes in the DRC and Nepal; providing financial support to NGOs for this purpose in Colombia; and holding events to raise its profile in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

### 4. Raising awareness

- In Kosovo, the President publicly launched, 'Thinking of You', a campaign to raise awareness about sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. It highlights the experiences of survivors and calls for people to support survivors rather than shun them.
- After visiting Colombia, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, raised awareness about the "silent issue of children born out of rape." She drew attention to "several generations of such children and adults" that had been overlooked, and urged action for change.

- In Uganda, Watye Ki Gen – a community-based organisation of girls and women captured by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) – has been documenting children in captivity and highlighting the devastating impact stigma can have on the rest of their lives. See page 13 for more details about Watye Ki Gen.

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**Pictured above:** Women in Bulenga, the DRC share their views on the vulnerability of survivors of sexual violence and the stigma they face in the community.

## 5. Youth voices and action

The 2014 Summit included 26 young delegates from around the world, including survivors of sexual violence, to give a voice to young people in the discussions. These young people continue to campaign to eradicate sexual violence in conflict in their communities. See pages 11-12 for more details on World Vision's youth delegates.

Following the Summit, the youth delegates set up a group, operating in eleven countries, to carry out various activities and encourage youth, NGOs and government members to work together to end sexual and gender-based violence in conflict.

**Pictured right:** Co-chairs of the Global Summit, the Rt Hon. William Hague MP and Angelina Jolie, join the Summit Youth Group in calling for action to end sexual violence in conflict.



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## CASE STUDY: WHAT WORLD VISION IS DOING

World Vision is committed to keeping survivors at the centre of efforts to address sexual violence in conflict.

### 1. Supporting the voices of youth in their communities

World Vision supported three young people from World Vision youth groups to participate in the 2014 Summit: Babra from Uganda, Esperance from the DRC and Suad from Kosovo represented their peers and shared ideas for ending sexual violence and providing stronger support for survivors with the international community.

Since then, we have continued working with these young people to carry on advocating in their communities. For example, Suad's network, 'Youth for Peace of Kosovo,' created a campaign to help break down the stigma attached to sexual violence by making a video featuring young activists calling for greater support to survivors who had experienced sexual violence during the conflict in Kosovo. Posted on social media, the video encouraged all members of the community to join together, break the silence on sexual violence, and support survivors. It received compassionate responses from both survivors and others who had not suffered sexual violence themselves.

#### What our youth delegates said about the Summit

*“I believe the international community has to join hands with national governments and support them to spread these ideas at the national levels. We need to get politicians and community members on board and work at every level... I want to go back home and join hands with my fellow youth in Uganda and fight to end sexual violence in conflict.”* **Babra, youth delegate from Uganda**

*“I want my community to acknowledge that sexual violence is a reality, and to sensitise and prioritise sexual education and not to consider this issue as a taboo that we shouldn't speak about. I want the Congolese Government to put an end to things that can increase the risk of sexual violence, such as alcohol and drugs, and promote positive values among all citizens. I have heard about what other countries are doing to solve this issue – I am learning from their experiences and want to use this knowledge to help my country.”* **Esperance, youth delegate from the DRC**

*“In Kosovo, the conflict ended some years ago, but the victims still face the consequences of sexual violence. It's a taboo issue and we need to offer victims*

*support, respect and love. In this way, they can overcome the challenges they face and start to rebuild their lives. As a result of young people's participation in this event, I believe that this issue will be taken more seriously at the community-level upwards. When I get home, I am meeting the Kosovo President and the UK Embassy to discuss the Youth Delegates' policy recommendations that were developed here at the Summit.*” **Suad, youth delegate from Kosovo**

## 2. Filling the evidence gap: research on stigma and sexual violence in conflict areas

One of the most frequently raised issues at the 2014 Summit was the stigma attached to survivors of sexual violence. So World Vision conducted research in eastern DRC and Uganda on the stigma survivors and their children face, how it manifests itself, its impact and how it might be overcome. The research looks in particular at the links between stigma and impunity.

From this research it is clear that the devastating impact of stigma feels worse for many survivors than the violence itself, as they are isolated and treated as 'dirty', 'damaged' and 'diseased'. Shortcomings in the justice system can compound this stigma, making survivors hesitant to come forward and participate in court cases. They fear people in the community will find out and, given the increased poverty they often face as a result of the stigma, they are also likely to lack the resources to participate.



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**Pictured above:** Adolescent boys in the DRC discuss how they see survivors of sexual violence treated in the community.

### 3. Ongoing support for our partners

Watye Ki Gen is an organization in the Gulu district of northern Uganda dedicated to supporting girls and women captured and raped by the LRA. As elsewhere, these sexual violence survivors and children born of rape are often severely stigmatised by their families and communities and find it challenging to return to normal life. Watye Ki Gen boosts their self-esteem and assists them to find work and shelter so that they can support themselves and their families. It also works with families, schools and workplaces to help them understand that the girls and women raped and abused by the LRA – as well as their children – are not to blame for what happened to them.

Angela Atim, who was captured when she was 14 and subjected to years of sexual violence by the LRA, was supported by World Vision after she escaped. She was instrumental in establishing Watye Ki Gen, a membership organisation of women and girls who had been abducted by the LRA. She was an expert speaker at the 2014 Summit. Angela describes how she felt on returning to Uganda after the Summit:

*“I feel stronger, determined, and not afraid to struggle for the innocent children born of rape. These children and their mothers feel there are people who love them and still invite them to such a big event to represent their issues.”*

Since the Summit, a Gender Ordinance has been passed in Gulu District, designed to stop gender-based violence. The law stipulates that crimes of sexual violence will result in imprisonment or fines and that survivors are entitled to reparations. Community leaders are now responsible for promoting gender equality and discouraging gender-based violence. Importantly, more mothers have also come forward to give details of their children born in captivity – acknowledging that just like any others, these children are valued citizens of Uganda.

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**Pictured above:** Angela and Janet lead the work of Watye Ki Gen (meaning ‘We have hope’) in Northern Uganda.

#### 4. Addressing gender-based violence

World Vision is committed to accelerating programming to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in the communities and emergency settings in which we work. In early 2015, we adopted a Framework for the Prevention, Mitigation and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and Fragile Contexts.

World Vision also recognises that gender inequality and prevailing negative social attitudes are underlying causes of gender-based violence and we have a number of approaches to help address these issues, including:

**Community Change Model:** helps community members to change harmful attitudes and practices, including those relating to gender. Local facilitators support their communities through a series of steps to identify concerns and agree responses. Through the process, the community is also able to identify and support networks within the community that protect children and other vulnerable groups.

**Channels of Hope:** harnesses the important role of faith leaders to catalyse changes in entrenched community attitudes and behaviours. Community facilitators work directly with faith leaders specifically on misconceptions around sensitive and taboo issues. This approach empowers them to use religious texts to transform their own thinking and the thinking of others in their communities to better meet the needs of survivors.

**Working with Men and Boys:** World Vision, in partnership with MenCare and Promundo, supports men and boys to think about what it means to be men and fathers in their communities. It allows safe and constructive spaces for men and boys to meet and talk and helps to promote women's empowerment and end discriminatory practices such as domestic violence, child marriage, and gender-based violence.



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**Pictured left:** Sexual violence can affect anyone, including men and boys. Boys and men are also key partners in changing gender norms.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The progress made against ending sexual violence in war zones since the 2014 Summit has been promising, innovative and encouraging, but so much more still needs to be done. All affected countries must ensure that sexual violence is not tolerated by prosecuting offenders and ending the culture of blame plaguing victims. Survivors and children born of rape continue to need and deserve holistic support, including medical, psychological, social and economic support that enables them to rejoin their families and communities without shame and live as they once did.

Ending sexual violence in conflict is an enormous undertaking. But, given time, it can be achieved. For something as complicated and as vital as this, it is not how long it takes that is the issue - it is the getting it right for current survivors and getting it right to prevent more girls, boys, women and men having to become survivors in the first place.

Speed of action should not be prioritised over doing things properly and taking the time to stop and check that the right progress is being made. Along the way, we need to recognise incremental improvements but we also need to acknowledge that complete healing cannot be rushed. When healing does happen, however, it will last and will be the reward for the unwavering commitment to ending sexual violence in conflict that blights millions of lives.

We can do this by continuing to focus on the following:

### 1. Ending impunity

To finally shatter the culture of impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence, we need to ask survivors what support they need to help them come forward and report the crimes against them. Only by acknowledging and bringing down the barriers that make survivors unable to come forward, can more aggressors be held accountable for their actions. Ending impunity is not just about legal reforms and professional training. It is also how we ensure survivors receive continual support after the legal process has taken place.

### 2. Putting survivors first: providing comprehensive support

The transition from victim to survivor of rape and sexual violence during times of conflict is a long and complex one. Too often the support survivors receive is fragmented. This hampers a full recovery. Because sexual violence can affect all

aspects of a survivor's life – from self esteem to stigmatisation and loss of livelihood – support needs to be holistic and cater for the very first moments after an attack through to longer-term responses, including helping survivors find shelter if needed.

For each individual, the journey to recovery and its duration is different, which is how it needs to be. Support for victims works best when it is tailored to meet their specific needs, be they a child born of rape, an abducted child or a grown woman or man. There can be no one size fits all approach. By listening to what survivors have to say and responding compassionately, at their pace and with specialised support – be it medical, psychological or legal – it is possible for survivors to recover and live the life they choose.

### CASE STUDY: "I FELT DEAD AMONG THE LIVING."

During the war in Kosovo, Elina was raped by soldiers. The impact on Elina left her devastated and alone. In her own words, she describes how she felt after the rapes:

*"I didn't want to see the light of the sun - me that used to love life very much. It seemed that my life had ended almost. Sometimes when I went out and met people it seemed that everyone was talking about me. Every glance towards me was another bullet in my wound that never recovered. I had forgotten how to behave as a mother, wife and sister or friend. I forgot how it was to take and give a smile. I had simply forgotten how it was to live, because I felt dead among the living people."*

For 14 years, Elina suffered alone, unable to recover and move on from her terrible ordeals. Then a friend suggested she contact the Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims. There, Elina received support, including counselling.

*"After I started having psychotherapy, I understood that there was a light at the end of tunnel. I felt safe and supported. Gradually, I started to regain my life. I was able to be a mother again and it was the best feeling I ever had."*

*"Today I don't see myself as a victim, but as a survivor, because I survived my trauma. This does not mean that I've forgotten what I have experienced. I walk with pride and do not feel ashamed or isolate myself. Shamed and isolated is how those who committed the crime should be - not me."*

With many thanks to the Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims for permission to use this case study.

## Getting immediate medical help

Sexual violence is inhumane. It can kill, maim and infect with life-threatening diseases. It can incapacitate, cause infertility or pregnancy and a lifetime of chronic pain. If not treated quickly, the physical consequences of sexual violence can be devastating. Medical help needs to be found as soon as possible after an attack, but there can be many possible barriers to doing this:

- Survivors may be unaware that medical help could save their lives or reduce future suffering;
- Survivors may feel too ashamed to seek medical help or ask others to help them;
- Survivors may fear that medical staff will mistreat them and pass their personal details on to their families and communities;
- Medical services can be inaccessible – they may be dangerous to reach, too far away or not functioning properly.

For survivors who do find medical assistance, this care needs to take into account their gender and age. Women and men, boys and girls suffer the physical effects of sexual violence differently and need specialised treatment. They can be further supported by being offered privacy during examinations and treatments, and being treated by a health worker they feel comfortable with. Depending on the wishes of the survivor, this could be a man or a woman, someone older or younger, or someone of the same religion.

Once specialist medical help has been sourced, it needs to be sensitive and compassionate. As well as physical trauma and shock, individuals may feel ashamed about what has happened to them, and be fearful for their very survival. Confidentiality is key in encouraging victims to seek help and feel safe while they receive treatment. Medical services must guarantee that victims' details will not be passed on to the police, other agencies or community members without express permission.

## Getting long-term psychosocial support

Sexual violence often leaves behind physical scars that can fade in time. But the scars inside, the mental ones that cannot be seen, are often the ones that hurt victims the most and are hardest to heal.

Psychological trauma after rape and other sexual attacks can last a lifetime. This is why psychological support must be there for as long as the survivor needs it, be it months, years or decades.

Some survivors may feel an overriding sense of shame or self-disgust that can destroy their self-esteem and confidence. Depression can damage relationships causing isolation and loneliness that can lead to self-harm and even suicide. Without long-term psychological support, victims can live a life half-lived, never reaching their potential. Helping survivors learn how to come to terms with what has happened to them, helping them to trust again and move forward is vital. Just like medical help, emotional support needs to reflect the gender, age, faith and ability of the survivor. It needs to be personalised and meet the specific needs of what survivors feel work best for them.

### **Getting the right kind of justice and legal support**

For many survivors of sexual violence, seeing their attacker being convicted in court can help with their recovery. A successful prosecution can help many survivors feel that once the offence against them has been officially recognised as a serious crime, there is a sense of closure to their ordeal, which enables them to move on with their lives.

Unfortunately, even during peace-time and more acutely during times of conflict, many courts do not deal with sexual violence seriously or effectively, often letting perpetrators walk away free. This may be a result of systems breaking down during conflict or prevailing social attitudes.

Just getting a case to court can be difficult. Survivors often feel their case is not being taken seriously either by the police or the prosecution service. They are often kept out of the loop on progress with their case and find it a struggle to access information.

Facing these issues may put off many survivors seeking justice against their attacker. The following protection issues can also deter victims from seeking prosecution:

- Lack of witness protection schemes: victims may fear their aggressor will try to physically harm them to stop testifying;
- Their case will be public knowledge and they may face being ostracised by their community because of the stigma associated with sexual violence;
- Mistreatment by the police and other legal bodies.

Survivors will need specialised and personalised support to overcome any obstacles to pursue justice through the legal system. Children, in particular, need specialised support in a process they will find scary and intimidating. Of course, these barriers themselves need to be challenged in the long-term by changing attitudes towards sexual violence and putting in new frameworks at government and local level to support new initiatives.

For some survivors, 'justice' may not first and foremost involve prosecution of the perpetrator. Even with support, some may decide that they do not want to be involved in a case in the formal courts – either because of lack of confidence in existing legal frameworks or their own personal views. They may or may not see community-level customary or traditional courts as a more viable alternative – although caution should be taken to ensure that these systems focus on justice for the survivor.

### CASE STUDY: WHEN JUSTICE GOES WRONG

In November 2012, according to the UN, at least 33 girls and 102 women were raped or otherwise sexually violated when government troops came through Minova in the DRC. After months of international pressure, 39 Government soldiers were put on trial in late 2013 for these rapes. However, only two soldiers were finally convicted of rape, 13 were cleared and the remaining men were charged with lesser crimes.

Speaking to survivors and those who represent them, it is clear that the process had significant flaws. Many survivors never spoke of their experience before being involved in the trial. Although their identities were hidden in court, the community was able to work out who the survivors were and they were stigmatised by the community as a result. Lawyers also noted that the lack of understanding of the impact of trauma on survivors' memories – and the likelihood that survivors' stories will not be consistent or follow a clear chronological order – led to evidence from survivors being discounted. Because of the low conviction rate, many women were seen as having made their experiences up.

While lessons were learned from the Minova trials, it will take time to overcome the damage this experience has done to victims – and the negative impact it has had on encouraging other victims of sexual violence to come forward in the future.

### 3. Prevention and protection: changing attitudes and ending stigma

Stopping sexual violence from happening in the first place is vital. A world free of sexual violence in wartime and in peace is possible. The long-term solution to help put a stop to sexual violence is to bring about large-scale and long-term changes in attitudes towards the roles women and men should play in society and rectify the unequal status of women.



Education and community dialogue can help challenge discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls that undermine their status, neglect their rights and sanction sexual violence against them. The roles of men can also be considered. Communities can ask themselves questions like: does a man being sexually assaulted make him less of a man? Why can't men cry in public? And, does striking or raping a woman really make him more of a man? They can help communities transform perceptions about what being a man or being a woman means.

Women, girls, men and boys who suffer sexual violence often experience stigma if it becomes known publicly or in the family. This can be compounded further by stigma from the impacts of sexual violence, such as: extreme poverty when stigma prevents survivors from earning a living, their injuries, and having children born of rape by opposition soldiers or militias, who may themselves be seen as 'the enemy.'

Every survivor experiences stigma differently, and their experiences can be influenced by many factors, including: where the violence took place and who inflicted it; as well as the services the survivor receives and how they fare economically after the attack. But stigma is often devastating, and many survivors report that this can be worse than the violence itself.

Understanding that everyone, women, men and children, have human rights, including the right not to be raped or sexually assaulted during either peace or wartime can also come about through education and community debate.

At an individual level, women, girls, boys and men, need to learn about their rights. And they need to learn how to stand up for their rights and expect support when these rights are violated.

As change comes about, governments need to be ready to introduce new initiatives with strong new legal, medical and social service frameworks that remove impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence, and, in places where rape and sexual violence against men have not been recognised as crimes, new laws and support mechanisms should be introduced.

**Pictured left:** Sexual violence survivors who become pregnant as a result of rape face increased stigma and mixed feelings about the children they are carrying.

# CONCLUSION

The 2014 Summit was an important milestone in the fight to end rape and sexual violence in conflict. Our task now is to keep the energy and momentum going on this issue.

Everyone – governments around the world, the UN, humanitarian agencies, civil society and communities – must continue to ensure that the Summit's Statement of Action becomes transformative and continues to:

- Address the structural and cultural issues that perpetuate impunity and victim-blaming;
- Ensure the needs of survivors and children born of rape are comprehensively addressed;
- Ensure that survivors' voices are central to shaping their support and instrumental when peace plans are discussed.

But above all, we all need to be seen – by survivors and the world – to be taking visible action. The words that condemn rape and sexual violence in conflict must become actions that transform the lives of survivors – so they see aggressors imprisoned, they receive reparations, are no longer stigmatised and all aspects of their lives are supported with holistic care.

It is only then that all survivors – children, women and men – can begin to heal and look forward to a better world we can all be proud to be part of.



World Vision is the world's largest international children's charity, working to bring real hope to millions of children in the world's hardest places. We work alongside communities in close to 100 countries to bring about long-term change.

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