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PART III

# ASSAULT ON THE VULNERABLE

Part III examines the impact of war on those generally considered to be the most vulnerable—refugees, women and children. As is often the case in this field, analysis is complicated by the lack of reliable data.

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# ASSAULT ON THE VULNERABLE

**Introduction**

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## Introduction

**When conflict causes people to flee their homes, their vulnerability to predation, disease and malnutrition increases — often dramatically. Gender is also an important determinant of wartime vulnerability — often in surprising ways.**

Although war-induced displacement is one of the few human security issues for which there are official data, determining trends is hampered by the fact that more than half the displaced persons around the world are not counted by the UN.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) collects data only on what it calls 'persons of concern' to the organisation. This includes all refugees, but less than half of the estimated 24 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The plight of IDPs is generally worse than that of refugees. As a new survey by the Global IDP Project of the Norwegian Refugee Council points out:

> IDPs did not receive sufficient humanitarian assistance from their governments. In fact, three in four IDPs, more than 18 million people, could not count on their national authorities for the provision of adequate assistance.[1]

But refugees and IDPs are not simply victims. As Fred Tanner and Stephen Stedman point out, 'Throughout the 1990s, refugee camps were used as staging grounds and resource bases for combatants in areas experiencing some of the world's most protracted wars.' (See: 'Militarising refugee camps'.) In fact, according to the UNHCR some 15% of refugee camps are militarised.

The question of people's vulnerability to the various impacts of war is more complex than often assumed. For example, one of the most frequently cited claims about today's displaced persons is that 80% of them are women and children—an assertion that conveys the impression of unique vulnerability to displacement.[2] In fact, a recent UNHCR analysis of refugee and IDP trends indicates that women and children make up 70.5%[3] —not 80%—of displaced persons.[4] Since women and children (i.e., boys and girls under 18 years of age) make up at least 70% of the population in many war-affected countries, this figure does not constitute evidence that they are uniquely vulnerable.

In armed conflict women and girls are *far* more vulnerable to sexual assault and predation than men. Here again the absence of reliable data makes tracking trends extraordinarily difficult. It is not even possible to determine whether wartime sexual violence is increasing or decreasing. Such information is critical for governments seeking to

understand if policies designed to reduce the incidence of wartime sexual violence are working or not.

Despite the absence of global data, case study evidence suggests that displaced women may be twice as vulnerable to sexual assault as those who do not flee their homes. Insofar as this finding is generally true, the more than five-fold increase in the numbers of displaced people between 1970 and the early 1990s was likely associated with a major increase in war-related sexual assaults.

Similarly, the decline in both the number of displaced persons and the number and deadliness of armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War may well have led to a net decrease in wartime sexual violence—notwithstanding the recent wave of assaults in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere.

> Amoung children, those under five years of age are by far the most vulnerable to death from war induced malnutrition and disease.

With the critically important exception of sexual violence, there is considerable evidence to suggest that *men*, not women, are more vulnerable to the major impacts of armed conflict. Of course, it is not surprising that far more men get killed on the battlefield than women, since they make up the overwhelming majority of combatants. But case study evidence also suggests that women are less likely to be victims of 'collateral damage', and non-combatant males are more likely to be subject to mass killing than non-combatant females. Further, some recent epidemiological survey evidence finds that males are more likely to die from war-induced malnutrition and disease than females.[5]

What these findings suggest is that women are more resilient and less vulnerable to the impacts of armed conflict than much of the literature that focuses on women as victims suggests. The increased participation of women in government military forces, rebel groups and even terror-

ist organisations also serves to remind us that depicting women simply as passive victims of political violence can be profoundly misleading.

Of course, children are the most vulnerable of all. The discussion on child soldiers draws on recent research by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and Brookings Institution analyst Peter W. Singer. Here the focus is not so much on the economic and strategic imperatives that impel the recruitment of children and that were briefly reviewed in Part I, but on how children under arms are used and abused.

Most analysts believe that there has been a dramatic increase in the use of child soldiers over the past three decades, driven in part by economic imperatives. Physically vulnerable and easily intimidated, children make cheap, expendable soldiers. Armed with modern light weapons, they can be swiftly transformed into efficient, low-cost killers.

But lack of reliable data again confounds attempts to determine whether numbers of child soldiers have recently been increasing or decreasing. Both governments and rebel forces routinely lie about their use of child soldiers and few if any records are kept, making the task of estimating numbers extremely difficult.

The estimate of 300,000 child soldiers worldwide dates back almost a decade, yet it is repeatedly cited as if it were current. However, given the dramatic decline in the number of wars since then—and the consequent demobilisation of fighters, including children—it would be surprising if child soldier numbers had not fallen along with those of regular forces during this period.

Whatever the numbers, there is no doubt that children generally—and not just child soldiers—suffer most from the impact of armed conflict and displacement. Among children, those under five years of age are by far the most vulnerable to death from war-induced malnutrition and disease. In some conflicts more than 50% of the 'indirect deaths' from armed conflicts are children in this category.

This 'indirect death' phenomenon is examined in more depth in Part IV, and will be a major focus of the *Human Security Report 2006*.

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## The plight of the displaced

**While the number of refugees around the world has steadily declined in recent years, the number of internally displaced persons has grown considerably. Many are sick and hungry, most lack protection, and few have adequate shelter.**

For four decades the number of refugees around the world has tracked the number of armed conflicts—growing inexorably, though unevenly, from the 1960s to the early 1990s, then falling commensurately as the numbers of wars declined in the 1990s, from a record high of 17.8 million in 1992 to 9.7 million in 2003. The recent upsurge of peace agreements in Africa, the world's most violent continent, suggests that this trend will continue, at least in the short-term.

Most displaced persons are not refugees, however. Of the estimated 33 million displaced people around the world in 2003, about 24 million were internally displaced persons (IDPs), and although the data are unreliable, it appears that their numbers have increased significantly since 1995 (see Figure 3.1).[6] Unlike refugees, IDPs do not cross national borders in search of safety—they remain within their home country.[7]



**Figure 3.1 Refugees and internally displaced persons, 1964–2003**
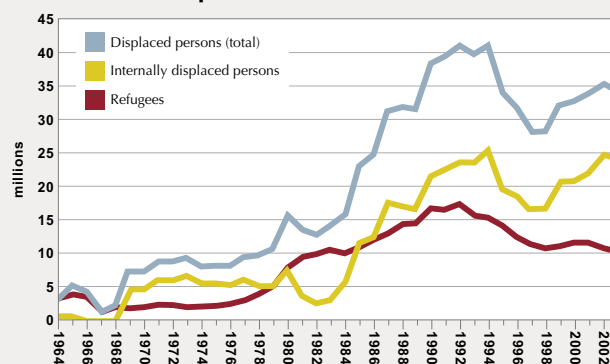
Source: Philip Orchard, 2004[8]

From the mid-sixties to the early 1990s, numbers of all displaced persons, both refugees and IDPs, rose dramatically, from about 5 million to 42 million. But while the number of refugees declined between 1992 and 2003, the number of IDPs increased.

Note: Refugee figures from 1964–1975 are estimates by UNHCR based on the arrival of refugees and/or recognition of asylum seekers.

## World War II and its aftermath

More than 30 million people were displaced as a re-sult of World War II, confronting the new UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (now the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or UNHCR) with a huge task of repatriation and local integration.[9] By 1946, howev-er, the looming Cold War made the repatriation of refugees to the Soviet Union and Soviet-controlled areas politically unpalatable to Western governments. Resettlement be-came the preferred option. As James Hathaway put it, ac-cepting refugees from Communist regimes, 'reinforced the ideological and strategic objectives of the capitalist world'.[10] Cold War politics rather than humanitarian need tended to determine who was granted asylum. In the 1980s, for ex-ample, the United States accepted only 3% of Salvadorean and Guatemalan applications for asylum, but 75% of those from the Soviet Union.[11]

For much of the Cold War the UNHCR and host and donor states assumed that most refugees would remain in their country of asylum for extended periods.[12] But over the years the rising numbers of asylum seekers and the in-creasing reluctance of host countries to absorb them, plus opportunities for some refugees to return home, led to a major shift in policy. Once again, repatriation became the name of the game. Between 1991 and 1996 the UNHCR repatriated more than 9 million refugees.[13]

In the West the end of the Cold War swept away any re-maining ideological motive for accepting refugees, most of whom now came from the poorest countries of the devel-oping world.[14] Opportunistic European politicians began blaming unemployment and rising crime rates on refugees, asylum seekers and illegal migrants. Governments argued that many who claimed to be asylum seekers were really economic migrants with no real need of international pro-tection. The claim was doubtless true in some cases.

And governments had reason to be concerned about costs. In 2002–03 the cost of housing and support for the 41,000 asylum seekers in the UK was nearly US$2 billion—'roughly twice the amount the UNHCR spends each year to support and care for 21 million refugees in its camps around the world'.[15]

## IDPs: Greater numbers, greater problems

In 2003 there were an estimated 23.6 million IDPs world-wide, up from an estimated 3 million in 1982. The protec-tion provided for these displaced people varies from non-existent to barely adequate. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, in 13 of the 52 countries that have IDPs, governments provide no protection at all, while 9 million IDPs in 22 other countries receive occasional protection. UN humanitarian agencies operate in only 21 countries—less than half the number of countries with IDPs.[16]

It isn't obvious why IDP numbers apparently rose be-tween 1995 and 2002 while both the numbers of armed conflicts and refugees fell. Several possibilities present themselves.

> In the West the end of the Cold War swept away any remaining ideologi-cal motive for accepting refugees.

First, the scope of the problem is better under-stood now than it was a decade ago—despite attempts by governments to invoke sovereignty and non-interfer-ence to quash criticism. This is thanks in part to the work of the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internal Displacement, but also to the increased numbers of NGOs and UN agency staff on the ground. So part of the increase in IDP numbers may be due simply to an increase in reporting.

Second, in many countries embroiled in conflict, 'eth-nic cleansing' campaigns mean that returning refugees have no secure homes to go to. When refugees return to their own countries, the global refugee total goes down, but the global IDP total may go up.

Third, in many contemporary wars, civilians are not only victims of 'collateral damage', they are deliberately targeted by rebel groups and even government forces. Mass killing of civilians in guerrilla wars is most likely to occur when guerrillas pose a major threat to the regime and are strongly supported by the civilian population.[17]

## MILITARISING REFUGEE CAMPS

The flight of Rwandans following the genocide in 1994 may have been the largest and most rapid mass exodus in Aftrican history and is deeply misunderstood.

Between July 14 and 18, 1994, some 850,000 people fled from Rwanda into eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), joining several hundred thousand who had traveled there in the previous month. By August, between 1.7 and 2 million Rwandans were living in makeshift camps in Zaire and Tanzania.

Many of the displaced were not fleeing the genocide; they were its perpetrators. The slaughter of more than 800,000 Rwandan Tutsi and moderate Hutu had ended in the middle of July 1994, not because the international community had finally been galvanised into action, but because the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a largely Tutsi force that had been fighting the Rwandan government for three years, had prevailed.

The genocide had been organised and directed by elements of the Rwandan government and army that had opposed a power-sharing deal with the RPF to end the civil war. When all seemed lost militarily, the *genocideurs* forcibly marched hundreds of thousands of Rwandan Hutus out of the country—an exodus fueled by Hutu fears that the RPF would seek violent retribution. But the genocide's organisers and killers blended into the refugee camps in Zaire—where they, like other refugees, received assistance—and quickly gained control. As Médicins Sans Frontières has pointed out, 'those responsible for the genocide... remained living with impunity in camps run by the United Nations, and the very system established to protect the refugees became the source of their peril.'[18]

According to the UNHCR, militarised camps such as those in Zaire now pose the single largest threat to refugee security. Although the great majority of refugee crises do not foment refugee militarisation, a small but significant number (15%) do have this effect. Throughout the 1990s refugee camps were used as staging grounds and resource bases for combatants in areas experiencing some of the world's most protracted wars: Afghanistan, Bosnia, Burundi, East Timor, Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan and the Palestinian Territories.

The fact that some of the most powerful member states of the United Nations used refugees as pawns in larger geopolitical conflicts ensured the UNHCR was denied resources necessary to stop the use of camps as *de facto* military bases. In its commitment to long-term relief assistance, the UNHCR was inadvertently supporting warring groups intent on exploiting refugee populations and humanitarian assistance as a means of continuing their violent struggles.

Recognising the dilemma, some refugee workers argue that host governments should provide better camp security. But in today's world, many host governments are either complicit in the political and military manipulation of refugees (as in Pakistan, Thailand and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) or simply lack the capacity to protect refugee populations (as in Lebanon).

The UNHCR has proposed measures to deal with the problem—ranging from modest preventive initiatives, to the creation of an international military force tasked with policing the camps and separating combatants from refugees.

While admirable in principle, these proposals will have little impact in practice as long as the international community continues to ignore the manipulation of refugees by host governments, neighbours, regional powers and, not least, the major powers.

In such cases, flight is often the only option. But seeking sanctuary across borders may not be possible for a variety of reasons—including the refusal of governments to allow displaced persons to leave the country and the reluctance of governments in potential host countries to accept them.

Finally, while the number of armed conflicts declined between 1995 and 2002, the number of people killed in sub-Saharan Africa increased dramatically, but temporarily, at the end of the century. Some of the increase in IDPs was almost certainly a response to this increase in violence.

## Failures to protect the displaced

When civilians become strategic targets, those who seek to help them—including humanitarian agencies—may themselves be targeted. This is one reason for the upsurge of attacks on humanitarian workers during the 1990s.[19] The greater the danger to humanitarian workers, the more likely those workers are to be withdrawn from the field and the less protection and assistance will be available to the displaced and vulnerable.

In 2002 a four-year survey by the Norwegian Refugee Council's Global IDP Project reported that:

> The global IDP crisis is one of the great humanitarian challenges of our time. In most of the 48 countries covered, IDPs struggle to survive with inadequate shelter, few resources and no protection. Warring parties often block humanitarian aid, unnecessarily worsening malnutrition and disease. Moreover IDPs—mainly women and children—have no one to protect them from multiple human rights violations: including attacks, torture, forced labour and sexual exploitation.[20]

IDPs are entitled to the same legal protection under human rights and humanitarian law as other civilians, and they are supposed to be protected by their governments. But some governments lack the capacity to protect displaced citizens; others simply don't care. Sometimes governments themselves cause displacement. When this hap-

pens IDPs have no one to turn to for protection—except on those rare occasions when the international community can be persuaded to mount a 'humanitarian intervention'. And even when governments—often grudgingly—permit aid agencies access to internally displaced populations, the situation on the ground is often too dangerous to allow unprotected agency personnel to operate effectively.

The ability of the international community to assist the displaced is further complicated by inadequate response capacity. In February 2004 Refugees International reported that field assessments by its staff revealed that UNHCR was failing to meet its core responsibility in protecting refugees—let alone IDPs—in every country assessed. Even official agency reports on the response to IDP needs are negative. A recent assessment by the UN's new Internally Displaced Persons Unit concluded that the international community's response to IDP needs was *ad hoc* and plagued by egregious failures.[21]

> When civilians are stategic targets, those who seek to help them— including humanitarian agencies— may themselves be targeted.

Agency turf battles are a further impediment, but the fundamental problem is that humanitarian agencies simply lack the capacity to address protection needs in the field effectively. Among official agencies and NGOs, there is general agreement that the most effective way to address this is through better collaboration. But while the 'collaborative approach' is widely agreed to be sensible, it requires a degree of cooperation that has yet to be achieved.

In the meantime—unable to depend on either their own governments or the international community—most displaced persons have no choice but to rely on their own coping mechanisms.

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## War and sexual violence

**Sexual violence has been an intimate partner of armed conflict throughout human history, but because of chronic underreporting by both victims and authorities, determining its extent in war is extraordinarily difficult.**

Men and women die—and suffer—in wars quite differently. Far more men are killed in battle than women. Indeed, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) nearly 90% of all direct war deaths in 2002 were men.[22] But women are far more vulnerable to sexual violence and predation.[23] In the world's war zones, women and girls are overwhelmingly non-combatants—and rarely have the means to protect themselves.

The history of sexual violence in 20th century wars illustrates the scope of the problem:

- During Japan's infamous assault on the Chinese city of Nanking in December 1937, more than 20,000 and possibly as many as 80,000 women were raped and killed. In 1934–1945 the Japanese forced between 100,000 and 200,000 mostly Asian women, most of them Korean, into prostitution as 'comfort women'.[24]
- In the final phases of World War II, Russian soldiers raped and gang-raped hundreds of thousands of women in the assault on, and subsequent occupation of Germany.[25]
- In 1971 hundreds of thousands of Bengali women were sexually assaulted by West Pakistani forces in the uprising and subsequent savage repression that killed more than a million people and eventually led to the creation of Bangladesh from what had been East Pakistan.[26]
- In the 1994 Rwandan genocide, as many as 500,000 women and girls may have been victims of sexual violence.[27] According to Gerald Chamina, Rwanda's prosecutor general, 'Rape was the worst experience of victims of the genocide. Some people paid to die, to be shot rather than tortured. Their prayers were for a quick and decent death. Victims of rape did not have that privilege.'[28]
- In the war in Bosnia, an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 women were sexually assaulted.[29]

In the new century the assaults have continued:

- In Burma, Refugees International reported in 2003 that a government-backed reign of terror had resulted in the sexual violation of thousands of women from the Karen, Karenni, Mon and Tavoyan ethnic minorities.[30]
- In Sudan in early 2005, government forces and militias were responsible for rape and other acts of sexual violence throughout the region of Darfur. These and other

acts were conducted on a 'widespread and systematic basis, and therefore may amount to crimes against humanity'.[31]

- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, government troops and rebel fighters have raped tens of thousands of women and girls, 'but fewer than a dozen perpetrators have been prosecuted by a judicial system in dire need of reform'.[32]

## Displacement and sexual violence

A major survey in post-war Sierra Leone found that the rate of sexual assault against women and girls who had been displaced was 17%, almost double that of those who had not fled their homes.[33] Nationwide that rate translates into 94,000 to 122,000 victims among the displaced females alone.[34] Nearly a third of the assault victims among the displaced had been gang-raped.

Unarmed and rarely able to exercise their rights, displaced women and girls become easy targets for sexual violence and exploitation. And while refugee camps provide food and shelter for women fleeing the chaos of war, they often fail to protect them from predation.

> No one knows whether the incidence of sexual violence in war is increasing or decreasing.

There have been a number of well-documented recent cases of aid workers and peacekeepers coercing women and girls into providing sexual services in exchange for protection, assistance and support for children and other family members:

- One 2002 report on camp conditions in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone cited numerous stories of sexual violence and exploitation by peacekeepers and humanitarian workers.[35]
- In January 2005 a UN inquiry substantiated allegations of sexual abuse by peacekeepers and civilian UN workers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[36]

## Is the violence increasing or decreasing?

No one knows whether the incidence of sexual violence in war is increasing or decreasing. Statistics on rape and other forms of sexual assault in conflict zones remain virtually non-existent and many post-conflict epidemiological surveys do not ask questions about sexual violence because they are too sensitive.

Victims are often reluctant to report that they have been sexually assaulted because they fear being stigmatised or further victimised. Many hold a well-founded belief that authorities will do little to provide redress.[37]

This chronic underreporting has allowed authorities to downplay the problem, with the result that rape and related crimes have tended to be treated as an unfortunate form of 'collateral damage'. As Human Rights Watch has argued:

> Rape has long been mischaracterised and dismissed by military and political leaders as a private crime, the ignoble act of the occasional soldier. Worse still, it has been accepted precisely because it is so commonplace. Longstanding discriminatory attitudes have viewed crimes against women as incidental or less serious violations.[38]

Despite the lack of reliable statistics, wartime sexual violence has received far more attention in recent years—and few doubt that it is widespread. But it is unclear whether the incidence of attacks is increasing, or simply that more are being reported. Both could be true. However, some inferences can be drawn from the association between sexual violence and population displacement.

As noted earlier, in the civil war in Sierra Leone the sexual assault rate among displaced women was close to twice that of those who had not fled their homes. If a similar relationship exists in other conflict zones around the world, then war-related sexual violence would have risen as the numbers of displaced people increased.

From the beginning of the 1970s to the early 1990s, the number of people displaced, many as a result of armed conflict, increased from 8 million to more than 40 million. So *if* the Sierra Leone pattern applies universally, then the

incidence of conflict-related sexual violence would also have risen massively over the same period.

After 1992 the numbers of displaced persons around the world declined, so the same logic would suggest that—all other things being equal—the number of victims of sexual violence would have declined as well.

Another possibility is that the *rate* of sexual assaults per hundred thousand of the population increased in some conflicts, while the *total* number of victims of such assaults decreased worldwide as the number of conflicts declined.

Clearly more research is needed before any definitive conclusions can be reached on this issue. And researchers need to bear in mind that rates of sexual violence can differ dramatically from conflict to conflict. One recent study found, for example, that wartime sexual violence rates in the conflicts in Bosnia and Sierra Leone were many times higher than those in Israel-Palestine, Sri Lanka and El Salvador.[39]

## Rape as a weapon of war

There is some case study evidence to suggest that 'strategic rape'—sexual assault that is encouraged by military leaders as a means of furthering war aims—has been rising. One recent study reported that rape had been used as a 'weapon of war' in at least 13 countries between 2001 and 2004.[40]

Rape can be used to humiliate and demoralise enemies, while the mere threat of sexual violence can induce people to flee their homes—a central goal of 'ethnic cleansing'. For example, in July 2004 Amnesty International reported that the Arab militias ('Janjawid') in the Darfur region of Sudan had raped women in public as part of a deliberate effort to humiliate, punish, control, engender fear and displace whole communities.[41] During the Rwandan genocide a decade earlier, rapes were 'often staged as public performances to multiply the terror and degradation.'[42]

So-called strategic rape is particularly effective against traditional 'honour and shame' societies, where the perceived integrity of the family and the community is bound up with the virtue of women. When used this way rape becomes a cultural weapon as well as a physical outrage, one that brings shame and humiliation to the victim's entire

family. This happened in Kosovo, where Muslim women were specifically targeted, in part because the perpetrators believed that once women had been raped, traditional cultural norms would ensure that they would be ostracised and could then neither marry nor have children.[43]

Sexual violence is most prevalent when, as is the case with strategic rape, it is encouraged and legitimised by political authorities. But even without official encouragement most wars involve a dramatic erosion in the norms that restrain anti-social behaviour in times of peace. And the general lawlessness and impunity that war brings in its train means that once the fighting starts there is often little to deter individuals from acting out their violent desires. Where pre-war social norms against sexual violence are weak, the risk of rape in war is correspondingly greater.

## The fate of the victims

Many wartime victims of sexual violence confront a tragic dilemma. If they do not reveal that they have been violated they cannot seek treatment, which puts their health, and sometimes their lives, at risk. Disclosing that they have been raped, on the other hand, may mean being stigmatised and rejected by the very people they would normally turn to for support.

> Sexual violence is most prevalent when it is encouraged and legitimised by political authorities.

Victims of sexual violence are at high risk of contracting diseases from their attackers—the most deadly being HIV/AIDS. Other diseases, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and venereal warts, often produce no symptoms in women, so infections go untreated. This can result in more serious conditions—the most common being pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility. In poor countries, non-existent or inadequate health services compound the problem.

## MEN AS VICTIMS, WOMEN AS WARRIORS

**Many analyses of gender and conflict ignore or underestimate the gender-based violence directed against males, and pay little attention to the active roles women play in warfare.**

In December 2004 Amnesty International released a major report on the vulnerabilities of women in armed conflicts. The press release stated, 'Women and girls bear the brunt of armed conflicts fought today both as direct targets and as unrecognised "collateral damage".'[44]

The Amnesty report is part of a growing body of policy-oriented research that uses gender as a lens to study the impact of armed conflict. This research has helped sensitise policymakers to the special vulnerabilities of women in war and in post-war environments. But the 'gender lens' has been inconsistently applied, creating a distorted picture of reality.

Notwithstanding Amnesty's claim, it is men—not women—who 'bear the brunt' of armed conflict. Both in uniform and out, men have been, and continue to be, killed, wounded and tortured in far greater numbers than women. Men are also, overwhelmingly, the major perpetrators of violence. Sexual violence is the area where women, not men, make up the majority of victims.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that in 2002 approximately nine males were killed in armed conflicts around the world for every female.[45] WHO's annual estimates of the gender ratios of war victims vary considerably, but all its reports show that far greater numbers of males than females are killed in warfare.

WHO's global estimates are broadly in line with epidemiological case study evidence. For example, a 1999 survey of 1197 households in post-war Kosovo found that 75% of total deaths and 90% of war-related trauma deaths during the conflict were males.[46] Ratios vary from war to war, but the consistent pattern of far more male than female casualties, is not surprising given that men make up the overwhelming majority of combatants. War is primarily an institution that pits males against other males.

Amnesty's claim that women 'bear the brunt' of collateral damage—civilians who get caught in the crossfire—is unsupported by any global data. In fact, case study evidence suggests that here again males, not females, are the primary victims.

One major epidemiological survey following the first Gulf War found that, while men made up 51% of the Iraqi population they suffered an estimated 62% of the civilian deaths.[47] And a 2004 study of civilians who had been killed in the current Iraq conflict found that males were even more likely to be killed than in the first Gulf War. The study, which focused on individuals who could be identified by name, reported that for every female killed there were three male victims.[48] (One explanation for the difference may be that women had moved to safer locations.)

The gender breakdown of 'indirect deaths' from war-induced malnutrition and disease—particularly in refugee and internally displaced persons camps—is also at odds with the conventional wisdom. Amnesty's claim that in war 'it is women and children that are forced to leave their homes' is not borne out by the available evidence.[49] According to the UNHCR there are actually slightly more male refugees (51%) than female.[50]

The common assumption that women are more likely to be adversely affected by displacement than men has *some* supporting case study evidence,[51] but most of the case study data points in the other direction. A comprehensive review of 46 epidemiological

surveys commissioned by the Human Security Centre for the *Human Security Report* found that the death rate for displaced males was generally higher than that for females.[52]

What about 'gender-based violence' in war—that is, violence that deliberately targets individuals or groups of individuals because of their gender? We know that women are far more likely to be the victims of rape and other sex crimes, but sexual violence is only one form of 'gender-based violence'.

Men, too, are targeted because of their gender. There is, for example, compelling evidence that non-combatant males, 'have been and continue to be the most frequent targets of mass killing and genocidal slaughter as well as a host of lesser atrocities and abuses'.[53]

Following the 1999 war in Kosovo, a report by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted that the most systematic atrocities were inflicted disproportionately and overwhelmingly on non-combatant males.[54] The explanation? Part revenge and part bleak strategic logic: killing battle-age males minimises future threats to the victors.[55]

Men are also disproportionately victimised by violent state repression. One major study used census data to show that the population of the Soviet Union in 1959 was 'some 20 million lower than Western observers had expected *after* making allowance for war losses.'[56] The deaths that led to the lower-than-expected population total were the result of Stalin's purges in the 1930s. Most of the victims were men. Given that males constitute a more likely source of challenge to repressive regimes than females this is again not surprising.

A comprehensive gender analysis of human insecurity would examine how men as well as women are victimised because of their gender. And rather than presenting women primarily as passive victims of armed conflict, it would pay more attention to the growing role they play in fighting forces around the world.

In many countries women now make up between 5% and 15% of government armed service personnel. The ratios are even higher in some guerrilla organisations, especially those that espouse a commitment to gender equality. Women made up 30% of both soldiers and leaders in the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, for example.[57] Other rebel groups with a large female membership include Peru's Shining Path, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers.

Over the past 50 years women have also played important roles in terrorist organisations—from Germany's Red Army Faction and the Japanese Red Army to Chechnya's Black Widows. And according to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, there has been a dramatic upsurge in the number of women suicide bombers. For example, some 30% of suicide bombings by the Tamil Tigers have been carried out by women, as have most of the suicide missions perpetrated by Turkish terrorist groups.[58]

Finally, some 40% of child soldiers around the world are girls.[59] One recent study found that female child soldiers were involved in fighting forces in 55 countries between 1990 and 2003. They were involved in combat in 38 of them.[60]

Bringing a gender perspective to the study of armed conflict has provided many valuable insights and forced policymakers to focus on the unique threats that women and girls confront in conflict zones. But the huge costs that political violence imposes on males have been mostly ignored, while women's agency remains largely invisible and women themselves have been presented primarily as passive victims.

Unwanted children resulting from wartime rape are yet another burden for many survivors. Women may be stigmatised for bearing 'enemy' offspring—known as 'children of hate' in Rwanda. But the alternative—usually a backstreet abortion—poses grave health risks.

> In the past decade, there have been signs that the international community has begun to take war and sexual violence more seriously.

Rape victims are also prone to deep psychological harm—including depression, psychotic episodes and post-traumatic stress disorder.[61] For some, reliving and recounting the details of their trauma can trigger renewed feelings of vulnerability, humiliation and despair. Health workers in the former Yugoslavia reported that survivors of rape experienced severe clinical depression and acute psychotic episodes after they talked with journalists, human rights workers and medical personnel. Some attempted suicide.[62]

Humanitarian organisations have also reported high rates of suicide among rape victims. For some of Rwanda's genocide survivors, the mere sight of their persecutors—many of them neighbours and colleagues—going about their daily business with neither guilt nor fear of reprisal has been almost too much to bear. As one victim put it:

> Since the war has ended, I have not had my monthly period. My stomach swells up and is painful. I think about what happened to me all the time and I cannot sleep.

I even see some of the Interahamwe who did these things to me and others around here. When I see them I think of committing suicide.[63]

## Changing times?

During the past decade, there have been signs that the international community has begun to take the issue of war and sexual violence more seriously:

- In 1993 and 1994 the statutes of the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda defined rape as a crime against humanity.[64]
- In September 1998 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda convicted Rwandan mayor, Jean-Paul Akayesu, of committing rape as genocide and a crime against humanity.[65] This was the first such finding by an international tribunal.
- In February 2001 the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia convicted three Bosnian Serbs of rape, which it designated a crime against humanity.
- The statutes of the new International Criminal Court (ICC) stipulate that when rape is committed as part of a widespread attack against a civilian population it is both a war crime and a crime against humanity.[66]

On the political front, the UN and its agencies, the World Bank and most governments now routinely affirm the need to address the special needs of women and children in armed conflicts. Speeches are given, reports written and resolutions passed. But rhetorical affirmation of the need for change, while important, has yet to be matched by real commitment to act where action is most needed—on the ground in wartorn societies.

Sven Torfinn / Panos Pictures

## Child soldiers

**In the many countries afflicted by violent conflict, child soldiers are doubly victimised—as vulnerable targets and as cannon fodder for armies devoid of conscience.**

Throughout much of the world child soldiers play critically important, sometimes decisive, roles in government and rebel military forces—even in terrorist organisations. They serve as infantry shock troops, raiders, sentries, spies, sappers and porters. A 1996 UN report, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, notes that 'Children as young as 8 years of age are being forcibly recruited, coerced and induced to become combatants. Manipulated by adults, children have been drawn into violence that they are too young to resist and with consequences they cannot imagine.'[67]

> Children are recruited because they are plentiful, cheap, malleable and expendable—and because light and deadly modern weapons more than offset a child's lack of physical strength.

In a new study on child soldiers, Brookings Institution analyst Peter W. Singer argues that the norms of warfare that once provided a degree of protection for children have eroded dramatically—and with tragic consequences.[68] 'Not only have children become the new targets of violence and atrocities in war, but many have now become perpetrators.' Singer points out that 'of ongoing or recently ended conflicts, 68% (37 out of 55) have children under 18 serving as combatants' and '80% of these conflicts ... include fighters under the age of 15.'[69]

Children are recruited because they are plentiful, cheap (often they are unpaid), malleable and expendable—and because light and deadly modern weapons more than offset their lack of physical strength.

## The numbers of children under arms

Determining how many child soldiers serve in armed forces around the world is no easy task. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, which defines child soldiers as persons under 18 years old associated with armed forces both in and outside conflict zones, puts the total at 300,000, with one-third serving in Africa.[70] But the reliability of this much-cited figure is highly questionable. The Coalition report simply notes that it dates back to 1998 and that it is 'believed to have remained relatively constant'.

In fact, the 300,000 figure can be traced back to 1996. It has been endlessly repeated, but almost never questioned. It is unclear what evidence there was to support the original claim and it seems highly unlikely that the true number of child soldiers would have remained unchanged for nearly a decade while the number of wars declined significantly.

## A worldwide problem

Children under arms can be found on every continent, but sub-Saharan Africa is the epicentre of the child soldier phenomenon:

- One of the worst affected countries is the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The 2005 Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers' report found that all parties in the long-running conflict 'recruited, abducted and used child soldiers, often on the front line'.[71] Children in armed political groups were sometimes abused by commanders and other soldiers and many were required to commit atrocities against civilians.[72] In 2003 approximately 30,000 children were awaiting demobilisation.[73]

- In Sierra Leone's 10-year civil war, as many as 70% of combatants were under the age of 18.[74] When the war ended in 2002, some of the children were recruited into armed groups fighting in neighbouring Liberia and the Côte d'Ivoire.

- When Charles Taylor seized power in Liberia in the early 1990s he did so at the head of a mainly youth rebel army. In 2003 Taylor was defeated by rival rebel groups that also relied heavily on child soldiers. An estimated 20,000 of the fighters in Liberia were children—some 70% of all combatants.[75]

- Northern Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has abducted an estimated 20,000 children during two decades of conflict, forcing them to wage war against government forces as well as civilians.[76] The LRA initiates children with beatings and forces them to kill other children who attempt to escape.[77] With a core of only 200 adult fighters, the bulk of its force consists of abducted children.[78] This child army has sustained a civil war that has killed thousands, displaced 1.5 mil-

lion and been described by the UN as one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world.[79]

- In the Middle East and Central Asia children are or recently have been involved in combat in Algeria, Abzerbaijan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Tajikistan and Yemen.

- In the Iran-Iraq War, Iranian children were used in the first wave of attacks to help clear paths through minefields. An estimated 100,000 Iranian children were killed in the fighting. In the current conflict in Iraq children as young as 12 serve in the Mahdi Army of radical cleric Muqtada al–Sadr.[80]

- In Latin America, Colombia has the dubious distinction of using more child soldiers than any other country in the region. In early 2004 as many as 14,000 children were serving in the country's paramilitary and rebel groups.[81] Children have also seen combat in Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru.

- In Asia, children have served in rebel and/or government forces in Burma, Cambodia, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and the Solomon Islands.[82]

- In Burma, it is estimated that 'there are more than 75,000 child soldiers, one of the highest numbers of any country in the world'.[83] They serve in both government and rebel forces. One children's militia was led by 12-year-old twin brothers.[84]

- In Indonesia, 'thousands of young Muslim and Christian boys have formed local paramilitary units' that take part in intercommunal violence.[85]

- In Europe, child soldiers serve or have recently served in rebel military forces in Chechnya and other parts of the former Soviet Union, and in the Balkans.

## Recruitment and indoctrination

Although many child soldiers are recruited at age 16 or 17, some are much younger. In one survey in Asia, the average age of recruitment of child soldiers was 13; an African study found that 60% of the children under arms were 14 or younger.[86]

Often separated from home and family, many child soldiers are recruited through offers of food, camaraderie

and protection; some join rebel groups to seek revenge for government assaults on their families.[87] And as the HIV/AIDS crisis continues to generate millions of orphans, the pool of children susceptible to recruitment will inevitably grow.

> Often separated from home and family, many child soldiers are recruited through offers of food, camaraderie and protection; some join rebel groups to seek revenge for government assaults on their families.

The threats and privations that children confront in war zones are often so great that joining a rebel or official armed group may seem attractive by comparison. For example, in a 2003 International Labour Organization survey in Africa, researchers found that nearly 80% of child soldiers interviewed had witnessed combat, 70% had seen their family home destroyed, and about 60% had lost a family member to war.[88] At least as combatants they are fed and provided with a measure of protection.

Once inducted into a military organisation, children are often subjected to threats, violence and psychological manipulation—all tactics designed to gain their unquestioning submission. To deter them from escaping and returning to their home communities, they may be forced to kill friends, neighbours or relatives.

The purpose of indoctrination is to detach children psychologically from their former lives, imbue them with a sense of group loyalty and, above all, to instill obedience. Some are given drugs to reduce their fear of combat, and their subsequent addiction provides their commanders with yet another lever of control.

The consequences of using children to fight wars are as predictable as they are tragic. Having less experience and training than adult fighters, children are more likely to be killed or injured. Seen as more expendable than adult fighters they are often given the most dangerous duties—including leading near-suicidal 'human wave' attacks and mine clearance missions. And because their inexperience puts them at a disadvantage against regular soldiers, they are more likely to be used to target civilians—including other children.

## Signs of hope?

According to Amnesty International, 'increasing numbers of children are exposed to the brutalities of war'.[89] In a similar vein, the BBC has claimed that the child soldier numbers are increasing every year as 'more children are recruited for use in active combat'.[90]

These are common views, but they are not supported by any evidence. There is no doubt that new child soldiers are recruited every year, but, as this report has shown, the number of armed conflicts has been declining for more than a decade. And when wars end, soldiers—including child soldiers—are usually demobilised. So it is more likely that the number of child soldiers serving around the world has declined rather than increased in recent years.

In November 2004 the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers reported that 'overall, the use of child soldiers ... appears marginally improved'.[91]

PART III

# ENDNOTES

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5.  This finding comes from a study commissioned by the Human Security Centre, the results of which will be published in the *Human Security Report 2006.*

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