

**WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE
FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM**



**Human Rights Violations
against Women
during
War and Conflict**

**Human Rights Violations
against Women
during
War and Conflict**

**Report of a Roundtable Discussion
parallel to the UN Commission
on Human Rights
April 1, 1997**

**Prepared by Sonja Wölte
August 1997**

**Women's International League for
Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
1 rue de Varembe
1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland
Tel: (+41 22) 733 61 75
Fax: (+41 22) 740 10 63
E-mail: womensleague@gn.apc.org**

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

LIBRARY

1950

1951

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

LIBRARY

1952

1953

1954

1955

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

LIBRARY

1956

1957

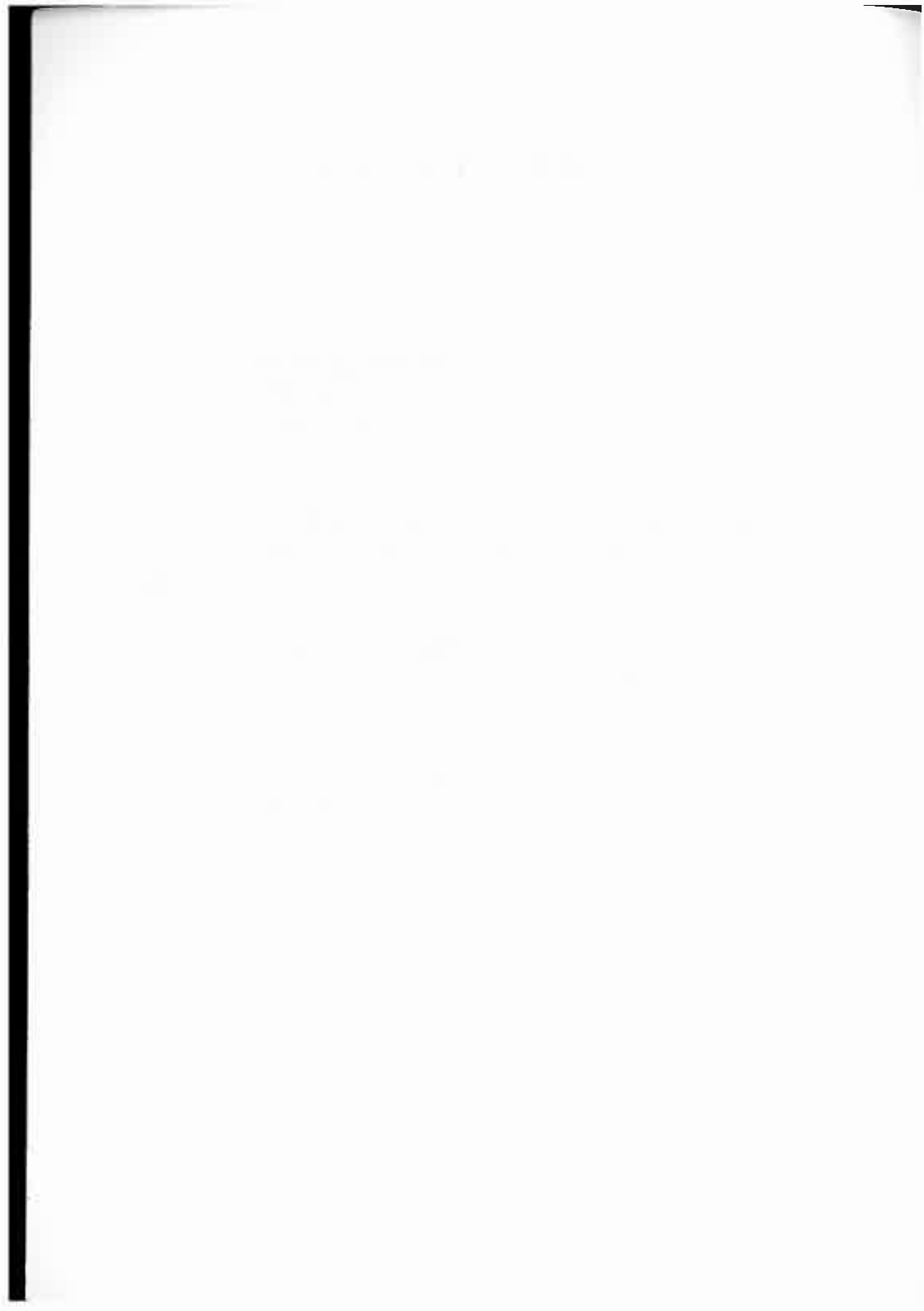
1958

1959

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Table of Contents

Foreword	1
Gender-Specific Human Rights Violations in War and Conflict - <i>Radhika Coomaraswamy, UN-Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women</i>	3
Role of Women in Decision-Making in the Peace Process - <i>Sia Regina Dunbar, WILPF Sierra Leone</i>	12
Testimony: Escalation of Violence against Women during Conflict - <i>Ilknur Sen, Free Kurdish Women's Association</i>	19
Rebuilding After War and Conflict: A Gender Perspective - <i>Birgitte Sorenson, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development</i>	26
About WILPF	34



Foreword

At the World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, women from all regions of the world, across national borders and from local to global levels, recognized the attainment of peace as the highest priority. Without peace - not only the absence of war but the demilitarization of all aspects of society - it is impossible to overcome poverty, violence against women, discrimination and inequality.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is an anti-war organization. Our primary objectives are to achieve total disarmament and the abolition of violence or other means of coercion for the settlement of conflicts. We strive for peaceful settlement for every conflict and the strengthening of the United Nations, the prevention of war, a sustainable environment and the political, social and economic co-operation of peoples.

War is a crime - the biggest crime possible. Governments and the military-industrial complex have to be held accountable for preparing and deciding to have armed confrontations instead of opting for active conflict prevention. Political solutions for conflicts and a comprehensive approach to deal with the root causes of conflicts are indispensable to meet the real needs of the people.

We organized this roundtable parallel to the UN Commission on Human Rights in April 1997 to give the floor to women, who in their daily work oppose violence against women in times of war and conflict. We want to show the different forms under which women suffer during war and militarism. At the same time we want to emphasize the strength and the enormous contribution women bring to the process of solving conflicts, helping victims of war, and rebuilding war-torn societies.

We thank all panelists very warmly for their profound and inspiring presentations. This booklet will serve as a solid contribution to the discussion on the state's responsibility for human rights violations against women

during war and conflict. We are glad to make its findings and recommendations available to the general public and to decision makers in particular. It is high time to reverse the trivialization of gender specific war crimes against women and to bring justice to the victims.

Barbara Lochbihler
WILPF Secretary General
August 1997



(left to right) Radhika Coomaraswamy, Barbara Lochbihler, Ilknur Sen

Gender-Specific Human Rights Violations in War and Conflict

Radhika Coomaraswamy

UN-Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women

Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy of Sri Lanka was appointed as Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, including its causes and consequences by the United Nations Human Rights Commission in April 1994.

In establishing the position of a Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the Human Rights Commission also condemned all violations of human rights of women in situations of armed conflict, and called for an effective response to violations including murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy.

Since 1994, violence against women has been on the agenda of the UN Human Rights Commission. The Special Rapporteur has reported to the Commission on an annual basis as of 1995. The first report dealt with her mandate and the general issues relating to violence against women in our society. The second report, in 1996, focused on violence against women in the family and included in its addendum a report of Ms. Coomaraswamy's visits to North and South Korea and to Japan on the issue of military sexual slavery during the second World War. Initiated by this report, the "comfort women" issue has received increased attention and has been placed on the international political agenda. This has greatly helped to advance the question of state accountability and compensation for the survivors by the Japanese government. Her work has also contributed to further the question of gender-specific war crimes and their prosecution in other international contexts, such as in the preparatory process of the establishment of an International Criminal Court.

In 1997, the Rapporteur's third report addressed violence against women in the community. It also reported on her missions to Poland on traffick-

ing in women, to South Africa on rape in the community, and to Brazil on domestic violence.

In April 1997, Ms. Coomaraswamy's mandate was extended for another three-year term. Her report for 1998 will focus on violence against women by the State and during times of armed conflict. In preparing for this document, information on the issue and detailed case descriptions are welcomed by the Rapporteur (send to: Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, D- 414, Palais des Nations, Ch-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland).

Ms. Coomaraswamy spoke at the roundtable discussion. For technical reasons, however, we are not able to exactly reproduce her speech. Below is an excerpt from her previous report (E/CN.4/1995/42) from which she drew a large part of her speech.

General

Rape of women and girls in situations of armed conflict, whether civil or international, constitutes by definition a grave breach of international human rights and humanitarian law. The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 states that "women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honor, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault" (art. 27). Article 147 includes in the list of acts constituting grave breaches of the Geneva Convention "wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health".

The International Committee of the Red Cross has interpreted this to include rape. In addition, acts of sexual assault against women are outlawed by international humanitarian law through normative provisions prohibiting violence against the physical integrity, dignity and security of the person. They include common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, in so far as it prohibits "violence to life and person", "cruel treatment", "torture" or "outrages upon personal dignity", and Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions, relating to the protection of non-international armed conflicts, which expressly forbids "outrages upon personal dignity, in par-

ticular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault" (art. 4.2 (e)).

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993, states:

"Violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. All violations of this kind, including in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy, require a particularly effective response" (Part II, para. 38).

Yet, although rape is one of the most widely used types of violence against women and girls, it remains the least condemned war crime; throughout history, the rape of hundreds of thousands of women and children in all regions of the world has been a bitter reality.

At the international level, with regard to the prosecution of war crimes, there seems to be a newly emerging trend, namely the setting up of international expert commissions and tribunals. The international community has adopted a more institutionalized response to the atrocities committed in the territories of the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda in particular. The precursors to such tribunals were the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo Tribunal). Although rape as a war crime was not an issue before these early tribunals, they set the precedent for international prosecution of alleged war crimes.

In the case of the former Yugoslavia, the United Nations Security Council established first a commission of experts pursuant to its resolution 780 (1992) and then the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991. In the context of the armed conflict in Rwanda, a commission of experts was established pursuant to Security Council resolution 935 (1994) to examine and analyze grave violations of international humanitarian law in

Rwanda. It is imperative that such tribunals make a special effort to investigate allegations of and to prosecute gender-specific war crimes of violence against women.

The Special Rapporteur notes with interest that the Commission of Experts mandated to obtain and analyze information on violations of international humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia conducted investigations which encompassed violations of international humanitarian law against persons, including extrajudicial executions, torture and other violations of international humanitarian law, particularly in detention camps. Special emphasis was given in these investigations to allegations of rape and sexual assault.

Furthermore, the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 2 of Security Council resolution 808 (1993), discussing the competence of the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, refers to crimes against humanity as being inhumane acts of a very serious nature, such as wilful killing, torture or rape, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population on national, political, ethnic, racial or religious grounds, and states that "in the conflict in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, such inhumane acts have taken the form of so-called 'ethnic cleansing' and widespread and systematic rape and other forms of sexual assault, including forced prostitution". These developments are most welcome in the context of prosecution of international war crimes.

Nature of Abuses

In recent times, there has been extensive documentation of violence against women in times of armed conflict. United Nations documentation on the former Yugoslavia is a case in point. In the spring of 1993, an investigation committee of the European Community stated that mass rape and/or sexual torture of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina must be considered systematic, ordered acts and an important element of Serb warfare strategy. Additionally, the establishment for the first time of camps explicitly intended for sexual torture marks a definite escalation of violence against women in armed conflicts. The final report of the Commission of Experts

identified five patterns of rape and sexual assault and concluded that, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, "these patterns strongly suggest that a systematic rape policy existed in certain areas ... practices of 'ethnic cleansing', sexual assault and rape were carried out by some parties so systematically that they strongly appear to be the product of a policy". Rape is, therefore, evidently widely used as another repugnant instrument for ethnic cleansing and for increasing inter-ethnic hatred.

In March 1994, the United Nations/Organization of American States International Civilian Mission in Haiti issued a press release condemning the use of rape against women as an unacceptable violation of the rights of Haitian women, which appear to form an integral part of the political violence and terror, in which armed civilian auxiliaries, "attachés", members of the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti and the armed forces of Haiti had all been implicated.

Most recently, the massacres, the hunting of survivors, the attacks on schools and churches, the rape and abduction of women and girls and violence against children characterizing the armed conflict in Rwanda have all been described in first-hand testimonies. According to a detailed report on the situation, "soldiers and militiamen raided homes, hospitals and camps for the displaced, looking for Tutsi women to rape. Girls as young as five have been raped. Some women and girls were macheted and then raped immediately afterwards, while others were allegedly gang raped, sometimes in public places. Some were acquired as a concubine or a second 'wife'. Fearful of death, many young women saw surrender as the only way to survive".

In addition, human rights groups and non-governmental organizations have extensively documented other cases of violence against women in situations of armed conflict.

(a) During the armed conflict in Bangladesh in 1971, it is estimated that 200,000 civilian women and girls were victims of rape committed by Pakistani soldiers.

(b) During 1992 alone, 882 women were reportedly gang raped by Indian

security forces in Jammu and Kashmir. Militant groups in Kashmir have also been accused of using rape as an instrument of armed struggle.

(c) In Peru, rape of women by security forces is a common practice in the ongoing armed conflict between the Communist Party of Peru - Shining Path - and government counter-insurgency forces.

(d) In Myanmar, in 1992, government troops raped women in a Rohingya Muslim village after the men had been inducted into forced labor.

However, until recently the silence over the issue of rape in wartime has denied the historical meaning of rape and its structural importance in gender relations. Public discussion on the issue of rape in wartime took place for the first time in 1992, when reports were received of the rape and deliberate impregnation of thousands of women whose rights had been violated by all parties to the conflict in the territories of the former Yugoslavia.

For the first time also, after nearly 50 years, Korean women survivors of the Second World War used as "comfort women" by the Japanese imperial forces have broken their silence and come forward to tell their stories. It is estimated that more than 200,000 Asian women, mainly Koreans, were forcibly recruited by the Japanese army command to serve as sexual slaves of soldiers in brothels, so-called "military comfort houses".

Motives

The underlying motives for rape in wartime should be looked at closely in order to recognize the scope of this extreme act of violence against women perpetrated by sexual means, as well as to understand the gravity of the situation at present, when the systematic and deliberate use of rape as a weapon of war marks an escalation in violence against women worldwide.

Rape is used as an instrument to exert violence, possibly as a manifestation of anger, in order to punish, intimidate, coerce, humiliate, and degrade. In a human rights report by Human Rights Watch concerning rape

in internal armed conflict it is stated that:

“ reported cases often involve the insertion of foreign objects into the vagina and anus combined with other forms of torture including electric shock to the genitals and breasts; rape of pregnant women and of minors; and gang rape by police and security force personnel. Often women are raped while blindfolded, so they cannot identify their attackers. Usually, they are told they or their family members will be killed if they report the rape.”

In addition, culturally and socially conditioned links between male sexuality, virility, potency and violence has been observed: especially in the case of gang rape, the perpetrators are generally seeking to prove their masculine identity vis-à-vis the woman, as well as themselves. This coincides with the fact that the occurrence of rape is particularly high in situations where male power has become unstable. In these cases, rape may be committed because a violation of the gender stereotype is perceived by the aggressor, i.e. the woman poses a threat to the man by being politically active, engaging in resistance movements or propaganda, so that rape essentially constitutes a sexual punishment for the trespass of a perceived gender boundary.

Rape in situations of armed conflict, however, may essentially differ in character, in the sense that it is not perceived as a sexual but rather an aggressive act, which gives satisfaction from the humiliation and helplessness of the victim. Naturally, individual incidents of rape are committed for personal motives of sexual fulfillment in times of conflict as in peace, but it is the increasing evidence of rape used on a massive scale and in a deliberate manner to further the causes of one warring faction over another that it is intended to be analysed in this section.

Distinctive patterns of rape have been discernible in situations of armed conflict, whether in Korea during the Second World War or in the territories of the former Yugoslavia. Women are abused and raped by looters and civilians, sometimes people known to them, prior to military action in their own homes, or in public in their villages to serve as a deterrent for any resistance to the forthcoming military action, to suffocate dissent and

to force collaboration. Upon the arrival of the military, the women are raped, sometimes killed and otherwise deported to detention camps. During deportation, women also may have to endure physical abuse. In the detention camps, they are once again raped and are sometimes required to serve as sexual slaves to the enemy soldiers, often having to endure other forms of sexual torture, beating and threats. Furthermore, the detention of women in hotels or similar facilities for the sole purpose of sexually entertaining soldiers, members of the camps and surrounding enemy communities has also been documented.

A further characteristic of this atrocious practice is the use of rape as a method to terrorize civilian populations in villages and to force ethnic groups to leave. An escalation in the atrocities committed against women during armed conflicts is the practice of forced pregnancy and maternity. After being subjected to deliberate attempts to impregnate them, women are detained until it is too late for them to obtain an abortion, in an attempt to humiliate the ethnic group of the victim and to "dilute" it.

The raping of the women of a community, culture or nation is also conducted because of a belief that such rape is the symbolic rape of the body of that community, the destruction of the fundamental elements of a society and culture - "the ultimate humiliation of the male enemy". Women are victims in the fight for male honour. The inability to protect women's sexual purity is seen as an act of humiliation.

Rape by enemy troops is also increasingly used as war propaganda. This sometimes leads to inflation of figures. The incidence of rape by one's own troops is diminished whereas the enemy troops' sins are exaggerated in order to incite hatred and aggression against them. Yet the number of reported cases of rape is never accurate because of the widespread fear of reporting incidents of rape and the social stigma associated with being raped. Severe traumatization, feelings of guilt and shame are accompanied by the fear of rejection by husband or family and by fear of reprisals against themselves and their families. Some victims of rape are driven to commit suicide as a result of all these consequences; others end up as prostitutes as their only way of survival after rejection of the family.

It has been found that a lack of trust in the judicial system and the national legislation and their effectiveness, as well as the fear of (publicly) awakening bad memories, are major reasons for silence. This distrust has largely been created by the condoning of this practice by commanding officers through inactivity, in most reported cases.

In his report, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, Mr. Mazowiecki, has repeatedly emphasized that, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he "is not aware of any attempts of those in power, either military or political, to stop the rape". Similarly, the civil strife in Peru, as documented by Human Rights Watch, has always been characterized by the Government's failure to prosecute the agents of abuse and to guarantee women equal protection under the law.

Impunity

It is exactly this official failure to condemn or punish rape that gives it overt political sanction, which allows rape and other forms of sexual torture and ill-treatment to become tools of military strategy. In certain contexts, in situations of armed conflict, institutions and mechanisms of justice have completely broken down. This ensures a certain anarchy, and rape is one of the consequences.

The impunity described above is further proof of women's powerlessness against a State that turns a blind eye to rape. The sad reality is that where no one is held accountable for gross human rights abuses and impunity for perpetrators prevails, women have no protection against rape and no way of seeking redress after they have been assaulted.

Role of Women in Decision-Making in the Peace Process

**Sia Regina Dunbar
WILPF, Sierra Leone**

Our traditions and customary practices frowned at women pushing forward into the men's exclusive and confidential world of decision-making. Often you would hear them say "the fireplace and the children are unattended what is she doing in the men's meeting?" This would be a meeting where decisions on locations of waterplaces, markets or a primary health clinic have to be taken. They concerned our lives (as women) but our lives are men's property, so the property and the decisions are theirs to take. Yes, it was like that for many many years. Women were to be seen and not heard.

The role of the women in the Sierra Leone society has been the same as in many other African countries: i.e. they play a major role as producers and bread winners. In the rural setting she works in the farm and runs the home. In the urban setting, she is a trader, works in small scale industry and runs the home. However, she plays a very limited role if at all in the decision-making process affecting her.

In Sierra Leone, it is only in the Southern Province and in parts of the Eastern Province that women can become chiefs or hold political office. The traditions and customs in parts of the Eastern and Northern Provinces do not allow women to become chiefs.

In the Western area of Sierra Leone, two women have held the high post of Mayor of the municipality and of Chairman at the City Council Management Committee. At the national level, the political scene remained dominated by men, although the struggle for gender equality and development have been fruitful.¹

At community level and decision-making, women's representation in local governments have always been low. Traditionally, women were not represented in village councils where political and judicial decisions were made. The political scene and all spheres of major decisions remained dominated by men since Independence (in 1961) until the recently concluded February/March 1996 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections.

In 1991 fighting broke out in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone on the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia and between Sierra Leone government soldiers and persons who were then taken to be Liberian soldiers but who later became known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) headed by Corporal Foday Saybana Saukoh.

The causes of this fighting that later became an internal guerilla war of self-destruction lasting for six years have been numerous and varied. One can, however, place these reasons under six main headings:

1. Lack of free and fair elections in which people can exercise their franchise.
2. Inequitable distribution of the nation's available resources.
3. The monopoly of political power (the selected few were bribed).
4. The deterioration of the nation's economy and social and educational structures.
5. High level of unemployment.
6. Gross dissatisfaction with the All People's Congress (APC) one-party rule.

Many people believed the APC Government's strategy to feed the unrest was to contain the war in part of the country and use the war not to call for general elections. The war, therefore, continued until 1992 when there was a coup d'état ousting President J. S. Momoh and the APC Government from office and installing Captain Valentine Strasser as head of state in a military government of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC).

The NPRC pledged to prosecute those responsible for the war and to speed-

ily conclude it. However, in 1993 the war escalated, the atrocities increased and it spread to the whole of the Eastern and Southern Provinces. As the military concentrated on governing the country instead of fighting the war it became clear that a military solution was unlikely and that the only way out was a negotiated peaceful resolution of the conflict.

By the end of 1994, the war had engulfed the whole of the provinces except the capital city, Freetown. This was when women all over the country realized it was no longer time to mourn but time to work for change. The war had spread beyond imagination. Statistics showed that women formed the majority of the one million displaced persons and over 300,000 refugees. Since a large number of males were abducted by the RUF, the amount of female headed households increased. Women's health and economic conditions became deplorable and dehumanizing.

At this time, we had no weapons and were untrained and unqualified even if we had them. But we had the capacity to mobilize others, promote self-reliance, raise public consciousness and influence international and national opinions about the atrocities of the war. We needed to strengthen each other and transcend the "handouts." Sierra Leone was in collapse. The women's role was crucial to preserve the social order.

During times of conflict and the collapse of communities, the role of women is crucial: they often work to preserve social order in the midst of armed and other conflicts.

Some of us had been to Beijing and had spent enormous time in the Peace Tent. The Platform for Action and especially its paragraph 139 was our drive. Those peace initiatives and skills we could now use as we bore the brunt of conflict. This was when women all over the country mobilized and formed themselves into the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace whose sole objective it was to advocate for the conclusion of the war through a negotiated settlement.

Against this devastating crisis and to demonstrate concerted efforts, women from all walks of life marched simultaneously in all the major towns to

demonstrate our one objective of a peaceful resolution of the war. We advocated for peace to be made a priority in the government's agenda and the national agenda.

The women lobbied with the government and Revolutionary United Front (RUF). We pressured the international community through their embassies and representatives in Sierra Leone to lend support to the objective of attaining peace. The women lobbied all religious groups, community groups, youth groups, and armed groups to advocate for peace. Various women's groups held seminars, public debates and discussions, radio talks ("Mainly for Women"; "What do the Women Say"), public meetings, workshops on peace initiatives.

Through the several debates, seminars, workshops, talks, conferences, we held, the causes of the war were fully captured and many people believed that perhaps the first step was to return the country to democratic civilian rule (in a free and fair election).

One recommendation out of the workshops was to examine the positive traditional initiatives for conflict resolution that were not used much but could become useful at crucial periods of the war as these. The people of Sierra Leone clearly demonstrated full support for the women's initiatives and participated fully.

By mid-1995, the government had no alternative but to submit to cessation of hostilities and turn towards the consolidation of peace. The Government's plans and support for elections was supported by the establishment of the National Commission for Democracy and the Interim Election Commission.

A new women's group, known as WOMEN (Women Organized for a Morally Enlightened Nation), also gained prominence as the leading women's non-government organization to mobilize women to politically influence the course of the pending elections.

The women's FORUM which came into being in 1995 in the wake of the

Dakar Regional Preparatory Meeting for Beijing provided another unifying force for all women's organizations to advocate for democracy and peace with one loud voice.

In Beijing, the FORUM representatives took the opportunity to highlight the horrors of Sierra Leone and what we were doing to stop it. Just before the elections, the FORUM took the initiative of submitting a press release to all political parties for women's issues of concern to be included in their proposed programmes. Women's groups collectively and individually invited political parties to meetings and debates to explain their policies and strategies for the new democratic dispensation.

In the run of the elections, the women and people of Sierra Leone volunteered their time and expertise both day and night to facilitate the whole election process. Violence broke out on election day but the women stood firm and produced a press release demanding security throughout the voting and beyond. We were covered, the UN observers were there and that was enough immunity.

On election day, women mobilized each other and others to vote. Despite security threats and in defiance of heavy firing, people turned out in large numbers, chanting "we want to vote". For most women this was their first time of exercising their franchise.

Amidst the fears of unpredictable violence the women were polling agents, presiding officers, and observers and we physically brought out other women to polling stations to vote. We helped man the ballot boxes until the process of counting the votes were completed. To aptly put it: "We saw it all!"

Elections led to the start of the peace negotiations. With a democratically elected President and a civilian government the Security Council of the UN, the OAU, the Commonwealth, heads of states and governments of the sub-region, particularly President Konan Bedie of Ivory Coast put a lot of pressure on Foday Saukoh to come to the "peacetable". After nearly six years of bloodshed and self destruction, rape, torture and carnage, the historic peace accord was signed on 29th November 1996 between Presi-

dent Alhaje Ahmed Tejan Kubba and RUF leader Corporal Foday Saybana Saukoh.

The women have remained unchanged in their pursuit towards sustainable peace. More women's groups have emerged. The Sierra Leone Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was formed in October 1996. Our goal embraces rehabilitation, resettlement, and reintegration of devastated communities souls and minds. We will focus our energies toward the promotion of sustainable peace founded on the grounds of social justice, economic and cultural development ensuring all human rights which includes women's rights.

Recommendations:

The government of Sierra Leone, international and intergovernmental institutions take action to promote equal participation of women (all over the world) and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace.

We note that the absence of women in decision-making roles within peace processes is in itself a human rights violation of the right to equal participation.

Women's participation at all decision-making levels including the United Nations Secretariat is indispensable to ensure equal access and full participation of women in fact finding missions in decision-making bodies. Women's perspectives and full involvement in all forms of conflict prevention and resolution are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

With regards to the consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone, the government should ensure that women's psycho-social needs are catered for through trauma-healing and conflict management sessions. As care givers they should be empowered through these programmes to be able to continue playing positive roles to broker and maintain peace in the homes, communities and the nation. In all this, their needs in the broader perspec-

tive of sustainable holistic human resource development should be addressed.

And finally, my sisters in the 1991 UNESCO 'Preparing the Grounds for Peace' report say, "Peace is possible because war is not a biological necessity. War is a social invention." It concludes that "we can end war and the suffering it causes by working together. War was invented; we can invent peace." And "we" means the women of the world.

Notes:

1 Women of Sierra Leone have a long history of organizing themselves to mobilize and sensitize disempowered women to improve their status and advocate for socio-economic improvement. This history runs back to the 1950s when the Sierra Leone Women's Movement was formed by women activists with the aim of advocating for political representation and participation in the key government sectors of Education, Social Welfare, and Labour. A National Federation of Sierra Leonean Women's Organization was formed in 1959 with the objectives of increasing the literacy rate of women and the economic improvement of disadvantaged women.

Testimony: Escalation of Violence Against Women during Conflict

**Ilknur Sen
Free Kurdish Women's Association**

For over 70 years the Kurds' very existence has been denied and their language, identity and culture have been banned by the occupying states, namely Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. This systematic cultural genocide in recent years has involved rural depopulation and destruction of Kurdish villages, forests and the traditional society in Southeast Turkey.

20,000 people have died, 3,000 Kurdish villages have been destroyed, a dozen of towns depopulated, over 3 million people have been displaced to date by state terror and economic collapse because of a war now in its 13th year.

To speak freely in a country ruled by an anti-democratic constitution and laws imposed by military dictatorship is risky - even for legislators. Death squads have killed more than 2,000 political and human rights activists uninvolved in the conflict. Among them 82 activists of the Democracy Party (DEP, Kurdish political party closed down in 1994 and its MPs were arrested and imprisoned) and 32 Kurdish journalists. Such is the price for challenging the official military version of the events. For similar reasons, over 100 journalists, academics and writers were imprisoned.

Most of what has been published on the tells of the Kurdish struggle against the occupying states are from the point of view of men. The daily reports of the terror of Turkey's war in Kurdistan only very rarely mention the struggle and the status of women. The struggle of the Kurds is presented with little attention to the contribution of Kurdish women and their experience of the war and the legacy on women's lives and position now. The

impact has been profound. And as the Turkish regime persists on a military solution, the violation against women escalates as the war escalates.

To understand Kurdish women's experience it is necessary to know something about their role in the Kurdish culture. Kurdish women have a reputation for enjoying a certain degree of freedom, being unveiled, and playing an active part in Kurdish political and social life. This is probably true, relative to the position of women in many other Middle Eastern societies.

The twin concept of honor and shame are crucial to understanding the social and psychological climate in which women in many different Middle Eastern communities live, be they Arab, Turkish, Persian and Kurdish. According to this ideology the honor of the family and in particular of its males, is dependent on the reputation for the sexual purity of the females. Sexual contact outside marriage, whether or not the woman participated in it willingly, brings shame on the entire family.

Kurdish women face a threefold oppression: the oppression which they suffer because of their economic oppression, their national oppression which they suffer together with the men, and their oppression as women.

Women and Scorch Earth Policy and Migration

We know that destruction of villages has forced millions of people to flee. What does it mean when women and children are driven away from their homes? How does a woman feel when she sees her house and all her belongings burned, her entire life being destroyed? Is it possible to understand the feelings of people who have no idea where to go, where they can live, eat or drink? Can you feel what a woman feels when she has seen her house burned to the ground, her son and husband murdered and her daughter arrested? Can you imagine a woman giving birth in a cave?

Many women who did not take an active part in the struggle have also suffered because their husbands or sons were guerillas. A favorite tactic of the government is to arrest the relatives of guerrillas and hold them in prison until the guerrilla fighter is killed or until he surrenders. Today, Kurdistan

is full of young widows, many of them with five to six children and they have to take up what were previously men's jobs in order to survive.

Women Refugees in Europe

The power in Kurdistan rests with the Turkish army, the gendarmes, the special commandos, the police and all the trappings of the special war. They particularly aim to destroy Kurdish women and their national, cultural and sexual identity. The practise is a double alienation. They make women the object of national annihilation, alienate them from all values and force them into a position without identity and without understanding of themselves. The oppression of Kurdish women is an integral part of the colonial oppression. The women are always subjects to sexual assault and even rape during military operation by security forces. Men fondle their breasts and finger their genitals.

Remziye Dinc, a young women in her early twenties, was raped by four village guards during a raid on her village in Batman. She became pregnant and subsequently pressed charges. Courts have refused her complaint for lack of evidence. She gave birth to her baby in order to prove its father's identity by medical examination. The medical report suggested that the father was one of the village guards. Her case still continues and the village guards are still free.

Sukran Aydin from Derik, near Mardi, was raped in front of her mother during a raid in her village in 20 July 1993. Her case is now at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

The Status of Kurdish Woman Political Activists - Humiliation, Torture and Rape

The situation of both Kurdish and Turkish women who fall into the clutches of the Turkish security forces is indescribable. According to the evidence presented by Terres des Femmes in Bochum, Germany, women in Turkish prisons are subjected to humiliation, torture and rape. Nuray Sen, chairperson of the Mesopotamian Culture Centre, was detained on 11 November,

1995. Her husband had previously been abducted by police officers and later found dead. After interrogation under torture for 10 days, she was charged with supporting the PKK. She has been released pending her trial and has filed a formal complaint about the torture she suffered. She said in her statement "During the first interrogation they grabbed me by the hair and punched my head against the wall. I was thrown to the ground. They kicked me and one officer put his boot into my mouth.... I was spitting blood. They pressed a wooden truncheon against my genitals and twisted it. They laughed, saying 'she is enjoying this.'"

Eren Keskin, a lawyer for the Human Rights Association, who was herself imprisoned in June 1995 for an article she wrote, learned from discussion with detainees that "rape frequently occurred in police custody." She said, "all women are sexually assaulted when they are tortured. The torture of women which entails sexually motivated violence against the female gender, means that the imprisonment of women in Turkey represents a gender-specific form of human rights violations."

The women who are detained are often forced to have virginity tests, allegedly for their own protection from being raped by soldiers. Nilfur Koc was arrested without charge in September 1994 when interpreting for a German human rights team of observers in the Kurdish region. She was blindfolded, stripped and surrounded by her male captors. In her statement dated 10 October 1994, she said: "...the police said some nurses were on their way to check whether I was a virgin. I said this would be damaging my dignity. He declared that he had his orders..."

The Human Rights Association of Turkey has also noted: "The families of women who are persecuted because of their political activities are harassed by state security forces during police raids in Kurdish neighborhoods in the metropolises as well as in rural Kurdish areas. Women whose husbands have fled to seek refuge abroad must undergo gynecological exams on the excuse of seeing whether or not the husband actually went to the mountains and occasionally visits the wife."

Mensure Yuksel Erdoohan, a journalist working for a Kurdish-owned news-

paper was detained in December 1995. She was interrogated by the Anti-Terror Police in Edirne and later in Istanbul. She eventually appeared in court and told the judge that she had been tortured. She said that she was stripped naked, sexually assaulted and given electroshocks. She also later reported that the judge deliberately prevented her complaint from being properly registered.

Leyla Zana is a woman who became the symbol of repression and resistance for the Kurdish women. She was the first Kurdish woman MP for DEP to be elected in Diyarbakir to serve in the Turkish Parliament. But the tenure as an MP was cut short when she was arrested with her colleagues on 5 March 1994 after the Turkish MPs voted to lift their parliamentary immunity. Failing to secure a death sentence because of international protests, the state prosecutor was however able to get the court to sentence Leyla Zana to an incredible 15 years in prison. She has two teenage children.

Aysel Malkac was 22 years old and had been working for the now banned pro-Kurdish daily newspaper *Ozgur Gundem* for three months when she disappeared after leaving the newspaper's building in Istanbul on 7 August 1993. Although there are unconfirmed reports that she was sighted in a prison cell, she has not been heard from since.

Since 1991, reports of "disappeared" in Turkey have increased alarmingly. Almost all of the "disappeared" are Kurdish villagers with no history of political activity, detained during the course of security raids on suspicion of giving aid to the PKK members (*amnesty international*, 1996: "Turkey - No security without human rights"). About two years ago, the families of the "disappeared", mostly women, have launched a sitting-protest, which is held every Saturday. They call themselves "Saturday Mothers".

The Free Women's Solidarity Organization, which is trying to organize women, has not yet achieved legal status in Turkey. In fact, several such organizations operate without legal status, for example the Diyarbakir families, a group of women who have lost their children or relatives in the war under torture and who came to Istanbul twice in 1996 to voice their demands.

Kurdish Women in the Guerrilla

The past few years not only marked a new phase in the national liberation struggle in Kurdistan but they were a big step forward for the liberation of Kurdish women. Women are represented at every level of the Kurdish struggle. Many have given their lives in the struggle against colonialism and racism. They are fighting everywhere: in the cities, towns and mountains. Women play a major part in the struggle for the liberation and a new democratic society free from prejudice, persecution and discrimination. Kurdish women fight on two fronts: for Kurdish self-determination and for women's rights. Their actions and their dreams and wishes in the struggle is a change from subordination to equality.

In January 1993, Turkish TV reports gave graphic accounts of Turkish soldiers raping dead female guerrillas. The Turkish President Suleyman Demirel excused this by saying that the soldiers were just "22 or 23 year old guys who cannot control themselves". The now banned weekly magazine 'Gercek' reported a verbatim confession by a soldier in its August 1993 edition: "Say, a woman guerilla dies in a clash. She is lying there, her body is still warm. You understand? Now, the soldier has not had a woman in a long time. He sees his chance. The soldier makes use of this opportunity and he does it."

In 1995, two dead women guerrillas were shown naked on Turkish Inter-Star TV. The results of the gynecological examinations were publicly reported in the Turkish media.

Gender-specific war crimes, such as rape, are being used as a military strategy and as a tool for "ethnic cleansing". It has continued during wars throughout history. Today, these atrocities continue not only in Kurdistan but in many parts of the world.

We demand that all war crimes should be tried. It is therefore necessary to establish an International Court for War Crimes which would also reverse the historic trivialization of crimes against women in war. Rape, forced pregnancy and sexual assault must be separately identified as war crimes to be investigated and its perpetrators prosecuted.

We ask the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women to visit Kurdistan and investigate the war crimes against women. As Kurdish women, we demand that the UN encourages a political solution for the Kurdish question. We demand that the UN insists on a halt of the village evictions and promotes the rehabilitation of the Kurdish villages and the return of the population.

Please support our campaign for the release of Leyla Zana.



Birgitte Sorenson (*left*) and Sia Regina Dunbar (*right*)

Rebuilding After War and Conflict: A Gender Perspective

Birgitte R. Sorensen
War-torn Societies Project
UN Research Institute for Social Development
Geneva

Introduction¹

Discussions of human rights and gender in the context of conflict tend to concentrate on the different forms of gendered violence that women experience, such as rape, forced pregnancy, forced prostitution and other forms of sexual humiliation. These are important issues to address since not only do they constitute serious violations of women's basic human rights, but they are also known to have a long-term impact on women and their communities. This may go far beyond the period of conflict and influence women's capacity to participate in the reconstruction of post-conflict society and their position within that society.

It is important to take a more inclusive approach to human rights and gender in the post-conflict setting and to include women's social, economic and political rights in the discussion. It needs to be stressed that the immediate post-conflict period is a time not only of recovery and restoration, but also of profound change and reform.² Political institutions and relationships are reorganised to reflect emerging power relations and new political goals; new economic institutions are created and new economic activities encouraged in response to the requirements of post-war recovery and long-term development, and social relationships and roles are redefined to incorporate the experiences of war and to reflect the demographic changes that have occurred.

The post-conflict period may therefore, present a unique opportunity to address existing gender inequality and improve or introduce gender awareness in policy making.³ Gender awareness in this context, first of all, means

that women's particular needs and vulnerabilities are addressed, but apart from that it also implies a proper recognition of their capacities, resources and rights, and finally it involves that steps are taken to ensure women's full participation in the definition of the political agenda for the rebuilding of their society.

In the remaining part of my presentation, I shall try to give a brief overview of women's experiences in the fields of political, economic and social rebuilding.⁴

Political Rebuilding

Political rebuilding concerns the restoration of the state and its institutions. It implies creating new political structures and practices that can translate a fragile peace into a lasting political settlement.

As intra-state conflicts usually have their roots in different political or ethnic groups competing for power and privileged access to resources, political rebuilding in the immediate post-conflict period often focuses on how to reduce or eliminate remaining political tensions between the competing groups and create a new constellation of power. From that perspective, political rebuilding is usually regarded to be a non-gendered state-building exercise.

From a more long-term perspective, however, political rebuilding also implies restoring or creating confidence in the state by demonstrating its legitimacy and efficiency. To achieve this, democratic institutions which ensure that the interests of all citizens are reflected and a legal framework that will guarantee the protection of their rights need to be developed. And from that angle political rebuilding is obviously a gendered process.

For women in most war-torn societies the main political issues are to make sure that they are represented and enabled to participate in decision-making bodies at national and local levels, and that their social and economic rights are recognised and protected.

In that respect, it is important to note that in most cases women are not allowed to participate in official peace negotiations where the nature and content of a political settlement is determined. And moreover, they also appear to be underrepresented in the various bodies that are subsequently established to set priorities and define plans for a post-war socio-economic recovery. This does not mean, however, that women do not have a political voice.

There are numerous examples of women who show political awareness and try to influence the political agenda: Guatemalan refugee women in Mexico working to influence the conditions of repatriation; Rwandan and Ugandan women fighting for the right to land; Sri Lankan and Yugoslav women making demands for compensation after the disappearance of their husbands are just some examples of women's political awareness and interests. In most such cases, however, women remain excluded from the mainstream political process and are forced to give voice to their concerns through participation in grassroots organisations.

But, for instance, in Uganda and Eritrea the governments have recognised the importance of involving women in politics and policy making. In both cases, women's rights have been ensured constitutionally and quotas have been established to ensure their representation in national and local political institutions.

These are laudable efforts, but they may not be sufficient to ensure women's full participation. As studies have also shown, women are often prevented from participating fully either because they face social obstacles from a society that is not accustomed to women having a public role or because they find it difficult to find the time to attend meetings, etc., as the post-war situation has made their domestic tasks more time consuming.

So apart from trying to ensure women's political rights through legislation and quotas, the post-war condition calls for additional efforts in order to change social and cultural norms in favour of women's political participation, and in order to reduce the burden of housekeeping.

Economic Rebuilding

Most of the countries that have been exposed to internal conflicts in recent years belonged to the poorer countries of the world even before the war. And the massive destruction of physical infrastructure and facilities combined with the decapacitating effects of the war has only left these countries considerably worse-off.

Rebuilding a country economically after a long war is thus a daunting task, which includes defining new macro-economic policies and objectives, restoring financial institutions, developing the human resource base and creating new employment opportunities, and, of course, rehabilitating the destroyed infrastructure and production facilities.

As with political rebuilding, a gender perspective is often absent in discussions of economic recovery, not to mention direct participation of women in such discussions. This is shown most clearly by the fact that despite a widely recognised need to concentrate post-conflict economic rebuilding on issues of employment and human resource development, women's role as primary economic actors has been widely ignored and their contribution to economic development underestimated.

Women play a crucial role in the economic survival and recovery of their families and communities, both during and after the war.⁵ Forced to assume increasing responsibilities for their families when a large part of the male population is absent, women engage in the production and marketing of local agricultural crops, local and at times even cross-border trade of specialised items, sale of firewood, fish, etc. Sometimes they even take up income-generating activities such as production and sale of alcoholic beverages or prostitution which may pose a serious threat to their social position and reputation in order to sustain their family.

In the post-war period the economic environment changes as the country seeks to re-establish a peacetime economy and to enter the development process. And for women who are left with a major responsibility for the survival and well-being of their family, such as female heads of households, the legal right to assets, such as land, possession of tools, skills

training, access to markets, etc., become major concerns. But as they often find themselves in a marginalised position and with little influence in decision-making bodies it is difficult to protect these interests. In some cases, women's organisations have successfully filled that gap and supported individual women with legal advice, training in management and marketing, etc., but it is often a struggle not easily won.

As a result, the majority of women continue to be mainly occupied in the informal sector or in agricultural household production, while men soon resume employment in the formal sector. And although women's activities provide them with a much needed income, it is important to stress that they enjoy few rights and receive little support to improve their situation.

In an attempt to help women in their efforts, some relief and development organisations intervene with programmes especially targeting women. So far their results have been mixed. One problem has been that many of the projects designed for women concentrate on traditional activities which are culturally and socially accepted, such as handicraft production, but for which there is often no market, or they train women to make products for which there is indeed a market, but omit providing the women with skills to market their products, sometimes with the result that male relatives or outside entrepreneurs reap the harvest.

In other cases, the good intentions and plans of developers to support women, have been blocked by social resistance from the male population who have felt the new initiatives to be a threat to their economic position and social integrity. In none of the cases do the projects succeed in giving the women a secure income and a sense of independence.

In other words, if women are to improve their socio-economic position in the post-war situation, it is first of all necessary to recognise and build on their existing skills and capacities developed before and during the conflict. Secondly, it is important that they are included in skills training programmes and are given access to credits that allow them to participate in both the formal and the informal economic sectors. Thirdly, women should be secured access to legal advice and assistance which could help them in

claiming their rights to land, tools and other assets which they need for their livelihood.

Social Rebuilding

Local intra-state conflicts which make up the majority of today's wars involve and target civilians in many ways. Social services are destroyed, large numbers of people are turned into a vulnerable group due to disablement, and communities disintegrate as their inhabitants are displaced and facilities damaged. And social rebuilding is a complex process which involves restoring the shattered social services and establishing new human relations and social integration and inclusion.

Contrary to the first two dimensions of post-war rebuilding, the gender perspective is relatively strong in social rebuilding and women's participation is generally acknowledged. This has to do with a common understanding of women's nature as being caretakers and nurturers; and in their social roles as wives, mothers and daughters women are used to and even obliged to perform these tasks.

In post-conflict societies worldwide, women tend to be given high priority to the restoration of social services. The lack of hospitals and health care in an environment exposed to many potentially fatal diseases threatens the well-being of their families, and with no schools and education the future of their children looks bleak. While waiting for their governments and the external donors to intervene with rehabilitation programmes, women have in many cases organised themselves and used their skills to provide a basic but essential health care and education to their communities.

In many cases women have also been playing an active role in the more complex process of social integration. Post-conflict communities are far from being normal, and they definitely are not stable; returning refugees and internally displaced, former combatants, disabled, orphans, and widows are unfortunately all typical figures in the post-conflict setting. And most of them return to their society with traumatic experiences that need to be processed and a precarious social identity.

The contributions women make to heal the wounds and to recreate a sense of community are many, and include such activities as providing assistance to particularly vulnerable groups, building and promoting peace at different levels, establishing cooperative relationships, and uniting the inhabitants of disintegrated communities in shared and social and religious activities.

Despite these efforts, there is still a need, however, for more attention and resources in the field of social reconstruction. And in particular there is a need to recognise and support women's own social rights. As has been stated so many times, the impact of war is different for different population groups, and women are often among the worst hit by war. When restoring social services, it is thus important to show gender awareness and to address the different psychological and medical needs of women and men.

Secondly, the fact that most women already have some skills as caretakers should be taken advantage of, particularly since the development of human resources in this field is a long-term project. Projects which have built on these skills and targeted women for professional health care training have generally shown good results in the sense that they have been a key to improving the community's health status while simultaneously providing an opportunity for women's socio-economic development. Similar approaches could probably be developed for other social services.

Finally, it is important that social rebuilding recognises the fact that as a consequence of war women have often become economically and socially marginalised. Not only should it be avoided that rebuilding efforts contribute further to the marginalisation of women, but new ways should be explored to involve them as beneficiaries and active participants in the development process.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I just wish to raise two points which seem valid for both political, economic and social rebuilding. The first one concerns the fact that although women can be demonstrated to make a significant contribu-

tion to the reconstruction of societies emerging from conflict, their efforts are often undervalued and their position marginalised. There is thus a clear need to involve women more directly in the rebuilding process, to build on and support their particular priorities and approaches, and to find ways to improve their socio-economic position.

Secondly, while there is a need to pay special attention to women in this difficult environment, it is crucial that rebuilding efforts, be they political, economic or social, take a holistic and inclusive approach. The post-conflict period is a period still full of political as well as social tensions that could build up to new conflicts, if care is not taken to avoid the exclusion, polarisation and politicisation of certain social groups and positions.

Notes:

1 The views presented in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the War-torn Societies Project.

2 Krishna Kumar (ed.), "Rebuilding Societies After Civil War". Lynne Rienner Publ., 1997.

3 Bridget Byrne, "Gender, conflict and development", vol. 1: Overview. IDS: Bridge, 1996.

4 This section is based on a review of academic literature and other documents by the author and Christine Knudsen in preparation of a bibliography on gender and the role of women in post-conflict rebuilding undertaken for the War-torn Societies Project. See also Patricia Weiss Fage, "After the Conflict. A Review of Selected Sources on Rebuilding War-Torn Societies", Geneva: War-torn Societies Project, Occasional Paper No. 1, 1995.

5 Carol Watson, "The flight, exile and return of Chadian refugees", Geneva: UNRISD, 1996.

About the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Background

On 28 April 1915, a unique group of women met in an International Congress in The Hague, the Netherlands, to protest against the war then raging in Europe, and to suggest ways to end it and prevent war in the future.

The organizers of the Congress were prominent women in the International Suffrage Alliance who saw the connection between their struggle for equal rights and the struggle for peace. They rejected the theory that war was inevitable and defied all obstacles to their plan to meet together in wartime. They assembled more than 1,000 women from belligerent and neutral countries to work out principles on the basis of which they believed that war could be stopped and a permanent peace could be constructed. They sent delegations to heads of 13 states in Europe and to the United States of America to present their views.

The Congress established an International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace which four years later became the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Activities

WILPF works for:

- disarmament
- political solutions to international conflicts
- economic justice within and among states
- the elimination of racism and all forms of discrimination and exploitation
- the respect of the fundamental human rights and the right to development in a sustainable environment

- the promotion of women to full and equal participation in all societies activities.

The League functions on the international, national and local levels. It seeks to educate, inform and mobilize women for action to achieve its goals. It organizes meetings, seminars, conferences and summer schools to study issues and seek solutions to social, economic and political problems. It organizes campaigns to promote disarmament measures, to halt interventions and to eliminate injustice.

WILPF sends missions to countries in conflict and reports to its members and friends and to the United Nations on their efforts to bring about peaceful settlements of conflict. It promotes international cooperation and the strengthening of the United Nations and its family of specialized agencies. The League has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, UNESCO, UNCTAD, UNCEF, ILO and FAO.

**Join WILPF and become part of a global
women's network for peace and justice.**

