Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Time to Act: New blog series highlights issues of SGBV around the world
June 2 2014

Next week’s Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict faces a formidable challenge – to not only inspire commitments to end sexual violence in conflict, but to elicit concrete actions to resolve this insidious and enduring issue.

As the Summit approaches, Women, Peace and Security Network – Canada members will examine issues of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and efforts to combat it, on our blog. For the next 8 days, posts will highlight the situation in fragile, conflict-affected and post-conflict states, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Syria and Zimbabwe. We’re drawing on the expertise and interests of our members to increase awareness and discussion in advance of the Global Summit.

Once the Summit starts, we’ll turn our attention to the proceedings, then wrap-up shortly after its conclusion.

Want to contribute? Please visit our Facebook page or Twitter feed to join the conversation, and use the hashtags #TimeToAct or #CanadasCommitment.
The fight against sexual violence in conflict continues to gain momentum in the international community, and this is evidenced no better than the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, taking place in London from 10-13 June 2014. This landmark event will bring together all governments who have endorsed the UN Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, as well as practitioners and representatives (and/or survivors) from around the world for 4 days of innovation and debate.

As opposed to just discourse or empty promises, this gathering, the largest of its kind to date, is intended to create action on the ground and to provide impetus for the movement against sexual violence in conflict. The UN Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict is currently endorsed by two-thirds of all members of the UN, and, while it does send a message that victims of sexual violence in conflict should and will be provided with the opportunity to see justice and perpetrators appropriately charged, it is at the moment merely a piece of paper.
It is simple enough to bring people together for conferences. The real trick is to inspire and create change, to move from talk to action and promises. This is, of course, much easier said than done, but therein lies both the most difficult and rewarding aspect of this scenario, for without such stimulus these conferences may as well not occur.

This will be the largest conference on sexual violence to ever happen – let us hope that all participants, in particular the governments involved, not only take it seriously, but go into this important moment in history with the real intention to create change.

This post was written by Megan Nobert, a PhD Candidate in Law and independent consultant on international criminal law, human rights and gender equality.
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Time To Act: Yasmin Sooka Exposes Sexual Violence in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka
June 3 2014

On May 8, members of the WPSN-C and local civil society organizations met with Yasmin Sooka in Ottawa to discuss her latest publication “An Unfinished War: Torture and Sexual Violence in Sri Lanka (2009 to 2014)”. A lawyer based in South Africa, Yasmin Sooka is the Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights and was integral to the post-apartheid South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone.

Her most recent report compiles the statements of 40 men and women who were victims of torture and sexual violence at the hands of the Sri Lankan military in the wake of the 2009 defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Based on the evidence of these testimonies, Sooka concludes that the Government of Sri Lanka is guilty of employing the systemic use of torture and rape to terrorize Tamil civilians, among them disproportionately high numbers of women and children.

Although the armed conflict ended in 2009, the Sri Lankan forces continue to wage war on the bodies of Tamil civilians, leaving them in fear of the consequences of speaking out. Witness testimony reveals the sharp increase in “abduction, arbitrary detention, torture, rape and sexual violence” following the ceasefire that was declared in 2009. Sooka’s report is a testament to the calculated and systematic nature of the crimes, exposing the ongoing corruption, impunity and lack of accountability plaguing Sri Lanka’s government.

The “Unfinished War” report, conducted in partnership with the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales and the International Truth & Justice Project of Sri Lanka, has grave implications on donor states, among them the UK and Canada, who have invested in a range of rehabilitation and reconciliation initiatives in Sri Lanka and who provide refuge for those seeking forced asylum from government persecution. Despite these graphic and appalling cases of widespread sexual abuse
and torture occurring at the hands of Sri Lankan military and police forces, the UN continues to involve Sri Lankan troops in peacekeeping missions.

Among the recommendations cited in the report, Sooka stresses the need to conduct an independent international inquiry into the military’s use of torture and sexual violence. She concludes by emphasizing the importance of holding Sri Lankan officials accountable for crimes by referring the findings of report to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for immediate and unprecedented legal action to bring justice to Sri Lankan citizens.

Photo credit: Three women at the opening of the Kataragama Festival, Sri Lanka’s largest interfaith gathering. Photo Credit: Brett Davies.

This post was written by Tori Roberts, WPSN-C Intern and student in the School of Social Work at Carleton University.
If we read, watch or listen to the news, we are aware of the extended and intense conflict in Syria and the staggering social disruption that has resulted. Over 6.5 million people have been displaced within the country and more than 2.5 million Syrians are registered as refugees in countries nearby. Those combined numbers represent an excess of 40 per cent of the pre-conflict population. It is of no surprise that in such circumstances, women and girls have been particularly at risk. Both women within Syria and those who have fled have been put at risk of increased incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) in general, and sexual violence in particular.

A recent report from UN Women -- 'We just keep silent’ Gender-based violence amongst Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (April 2014) -- explains that “the experience of forced relocation has meant increased levels of violence and insecurity for women and girls.” Disturbingly, it goes on to say that “more than half of those interviewed for this report stated that fear of rape was a primary driving factor for their fleeing Syria -- a finding similar to that found in a 2012 assessment in Lebanon.”

Sexual violence experienced in Syria prior to leaving was reported in all of the focus groups and young women in particular indicated that they voluntarily curtailed their time spent outside the home as a result. Risks remained after leaving Syria, however, with a range of GBV issues including higher rates of intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, early and forced marriage and honour killings, to name a few.

These concerns are “exacerbated by inadequate access to affordable safe housing, overcrowding and a lack of opportunities for employment and education.” Violence
against women and girls is underreported and the stigma associated with it means that it is impossible to provide an accurate assessment of the number of cases. However, it is nonetheless clear that there is a need for reproductive health care, psychosocial assistance, education and job training, and protection strategies for survivors.

While prevention through changing community attitudes is the desired outcome, the report also provides specific recommendations aimed at government, humanitarian groups and donors.

The experience of Syrian women in Iraq is not unique. An earlier report, produced by UN Women in July 2013 (Inter-Agency Assessment: Gender-based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage) addressed the similar problems and challenges that face Syrian women refugees in Jordan, albeit on a much larger scale. At the time of report, Jordan was the host of more than 470,000 Syrian refugees, eighty per cent are women and children. Similar issues regarding access to services for survivors (either a lack of services all together or a lack of knowledge of what is available), early marriage, and child protection concerns are raised.

And another report, Violence against Women, Bleeding Wound in the Syrian Conflict, written by Sema Nasar for the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network in late 2013, addresses the range of violent acts that Syria women continue to be exposed to within Syria. It reiterates the difficulties in documenting the extent of the problem, but the report intends to “shed light on the range of violence and violations affecting Syrian women in the context of the conflict, including crimes under international law ... in view of advocating for perpetrators to be held accountable in the future, and for extensive efforts to be deployed to support and rehabilitate the victims, their families and communities.”

Syrian refugee, Oum Ali, wipes away tears as she recalls her escape from Aleppo. Photo credit: Mohamed Azakir / World Bank

This post was written by Monique Cuillerier. She is the Membership and Communications Director of the World Federalist Movement – Canada.
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Time to Act: Educating girls in Nigeria
June 5 2014

The abduction of over 200 girls has sparked global response and attention to the largest West African country – Nigeria. Apart from the terrorist perspective to this story, one major feature is the fact that these girls were kidnapped from their citadel of education.

The power of education in a girl’s life is vital. According to Nicholas Kristof, “the greatest threat to extremism isn’t drones firing missiles but girls reading books”. Educating a woman is critical tool in ending global poverty because she is armed with adequate knowledge on how “to boost her financial status, produce healthy children and continue the circle of education by educating her children”.

The article “Standing Up for Girls Education in Nigeria” reveals that the recent Boko Haram attack has created a setback for girl’s education in Northern Nigeria because “families who traditionally do not believe in girls going to school will be less likely to see any benefits in sending their girls to school because of the stigma attached to rape and sexual violence.”

Despite all the challenges facing these girls, the Nigerian women have a history of standing up for their rights through peaceful protests. Social media has also become a powerful tool in the campaign to end violence against women and girls. With the abduction of over 200 high school girls, the trending hashtag #bringbackourgirls has engendered international concern.
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Photo: “Families who traditionally do not believe in girls going to school,” explained a Nigerian activist, “will be less likely to see any benefits in sending their girls to school because of the stigma attached to rape and sexual violence.” Photo credit: Michael Fleshman / Foreign Policy in Focus

This post was written by Ifeoluwa Ayanwole. She recently graduated with an MA in Globalization and International Development from the University of Ottawa and conducted her graduate research on the importance of elite bargains in Nigerian politics.
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Time to Act: Men - get involved and speak up!
June 5 2014

Catchphrases such as “Be a man”, “Men let's talk”, “Don't be a passive standby” are indications that the concern for violence against women (VAW) is fast becoming a man's responsibility. UN data reveals that “women face a higher risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents and malaria combined”. Likewise, UN Women’s campaign to end VAW estimates that women face a 70% risk of violence in their lifetime. These statistics reveal that VAW is an issue of concern that requires rapid response. However, over the years, gender violence has been regarded as a “female concern”; thereby, drawing traction mostly among women.

Jackson Katz, a renowned author and social theorist, argues that gender violence should not only be of concern to women but to men as well. In his TED talk, he stresses that the role of men in the campaign to end VAW cannot be over-emphasized. Although men are often viewed mainly as potential perpetrators of violence, Katz' perspective represents a paradigm shift from men as perpetrators to collaborators in the fight against violence. Men are critical to ending VAW because it is men's wives, mothers, sisters and friends who are victims of this cruelty.

The White Ribbon Prevention Research Series reveals that since it is a “minority of men that treat women and girls with contempt and violence”, it is therefore up to the majority of men to help “create a culture in which this is unacceptable.” This underscores the need to involve men as “activists, policy makers, gatekeepers and advocates” in the prevention of VAW.
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Contemporary literature by Katz, Michael Kaufman, Michael Kimmel, Gary Barker and others have shown that men play a significant role in reducing endemic violence against women, so engaging men as non-violent allies is a step in the right direction.

It is high time men play a significant role in addressing what was once tagged a “women’s issue”. One assault is too many. Now is the time for men to act.

Photo: Jackson Katz, an anti-violence educator and author, explains how language shapes our understanding of violence against women. On the board, the phrases progressively obscure meaning and shift responsibility from John to Mary, saying (from top): "John beats Mary", "Mary was beaten by John", "Mary was beaten", "Mary was battered", and "Mary is a battered woman". Photo credit: TEDxTaipei.

This post was written by Ifeoluwa Ayanwole. She recently graduated with an MA in Globalization and International Development from the University of Ottawa and conducted her graduate research on the importance of elite bargains in Nigerian politics.
The story is familiar.

In Zimbabwe, 1 in 3 women and girls are sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. This abuse is usually perpetrated by someone close to the victim – a current or former boyfriend or husband, a family member, a teacher. Most survivors don’t report the crime or seek help. When state institutions, including the military, police and judiciary, are better known for perpetrating and permitting sexual violence rather than preventing and prosecuting it, why would they?

This story may be changing, however.

Building on decades of women’s activism, thousands of men in Zimbabwe are calling on other men to become women's allies and to speak out against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in their communities. Padare/Enkundleni/Men’s Forum on Gender is leading these efforts.

Padare is a feminist men's organization that engages men and boys on gender issues, including SGBV. The organization sees SGBV as a manifestation of gender inequality and a social system that devalues women and girls. Its goal is to create a gender-just society in which all people have equal rights and are able to exercise those rights, which will result in a better society for men and women, girls and boys.

To accomplish this, the organization uses the historic Shona practice of the “dare” – a forum in which men come together to discuss issues of importance to their communities – as a platform to challenge men and boys to consider what it means to be a man. Having started this process of self-reflection, Padare’s facilitators then encourage men and boys to see respect for women and girls, men’s care-giving roles, and emotional vulnerability as crucial elements of masculinity.
Padare also holds community dialogues which include men, women and children, religious and traditional leaders, health workers and police, to raise awareness and build consensus on how to address gender issues on a broader scale. Additionally, the organization engages the national media, leads gender clubs in public schools, and works closely with the women's movement. It is even an honorary member of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, a network of over 70 women's rights organizations and activists.

By working with this range of actors, Padare has gained access to and influence among disparate communities, decision-makers and policy-makers. Indeed, having built relationships with the government, police and judiciary, Padare is able to lobby on behalf of domestic violence survivors and facilitate dialogue between citizens and state institutions. Among the organization's greatest achievements are its contributions to the Domestic Violence Act passed in 2007 and to the gender equality provisions in the Constitution approved in 2013.

These successes are notable as Zimbabwe's political tensions and the antagonistic relationship between citizens and security forces are well-documented. The 2008 election, for example, saw hundreds of opposition supporters attacked and dozens of women raped with impunity. While national and international laws exist to protect women's rights, including CEDAW, UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 1820, they are consistently ignored.

Civil society efforts to promote women's rights and end impunity for SGBV-related crimes are, therefore, essential to create change. This is, in part, why Padare takes a two-pronged approach to promote gender-justice, working with communities to change attitudes and behaviours, and with government and state institutions to change polices and laws.

The organization also brings these parties together. For example, in its community dialogues, Padare regularly invites members of the police force’s victim-friendly unit to participate. This provides the police a non-threatening platform for public education and engagement, and allows communities to hold the police accountable for their actions and increases public confidence in state institutions.

This work is not without its challenges, however. Ongoing political tensions create an environment of uncertainty and Padare continues to face suspicion from elected leaders and state officials at all levels. The organization also faces backlash from men and women who are resistant to change and, in particular, to women’s empowerment. Much of this resistance is rooted in ideology and identity and, as
**Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict**
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

gender equality is sometimes seen as a foreign concept, is influenced by ongoing political rhetoric that invokes the need for anti-colonial struggle.

Even so, Padare has chapters across the country and an ever-increasing membership, meaning that men and boys are responding to the call for new, transformative masculinities that embrace women and girls as equals.

Zimbabweans are writing their own story and, in time, gender inequality and SGBV may be written out.

*Photo: Padare hosted its first Gender Summer School, which included workshops and knowledge-sharing activities, in 2010. Photo credit: Padare/Enkundleni/Men's Forum on Gender.*

This post was written by Amber Minnings. She recently completed an MA in Globalization and International Development / Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa and conducted her graduate research on men's efforts to end violence against women and girls in Zimbabwe. You can follow her on Twitter at @AmberMinnings.
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Time to Act: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo: What Should Canada Do?
June 9 2014

Last month, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development released a report by its Subcommittee on Human Rights: A Weapon of War: Rape and Sexual Violence Against Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo – Canada’s Role in Taking Action and Ending Impunity.

The report reviews testimony heard by the Subcommittee over the last few years on conflict-related sexual violence – in general and in the DRC. It includes 12 recommendations, many of which address issues of interest to WPSN-C members. The report also requests that the Government table a “comprehensive response” to the report. This is something to watch for!

The report examines causes and consequences of sexual violence as a weapon of war, following natural disasters and in other crisis situations. The Subcommittee heard that there are various underlying factors that contribute to “shaping an environment in which sexual violence can occur, including entrenched discriminatory practices and attitudes, weak rule of law, poverty and lack of economic opportunity, and a climate of impunity for perpetrators.”

The report notes that a number of key factors contribute specifically to the prevalence of sexual violence in the DRC:

- Widespread discrimination against women in Congolese law and society;
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict

Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

- Weak rule of law and a critically under-resourced justice sector that lacks capacity, independence and impartiality, leading to pervasive impunity;

- An ineffective, ill-disciplined security sector that is not subject to effective civilian control; and,

- Competition among armed groups and individuals for control of natural resource revenues in a region affected by widespread poverty and lack of economic opportunity.

The Subcommittee made 12 recommendations to the Government of Canada. Some relate to Canada’s relationship with DRC and others to the issue of conflict-related sexual violence more generally.

Many of the recommendations are of interest to members of the WPSN-C and touch on actions that the Canadian Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict has been urging. For example, the report recommends that Canada “continue” to “make the promotion and protection of women's human rights a foreign policy priority, and that it work to strengthen women's participation in securing, maintaining and consolidating international peace and security.”

Also included in the recommendations is a review of Canadian assistance to the DRC with “a view to considering the possibility of funding smaller, grass-roots programs” – one of the issues raised by the WPSN-C in its testimony to the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights earlier this year.

The report also recommends that the Government of Canada continue to take steps to “protect and support those who work with survivors of sexual violence in particular, and human rights defenders more generally, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in other situations of conflict and crisis.”

The final recommendation is that the Government of Canada “continue working to ensure that that Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security is implemented in all relevant policies and programming; that, in order to provide timely and robust public reports, the Government of Canada continue to make efforts to address challenges associated with collecting data and reporting across government departments, which undertake their activities under diverse mandates, policies and processes; and that the Government of Canada consult with civil society organizations during evaluations and reviews of the National Action Plan.”
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014
The report provides a clear overview of the issues and concrete recommendations for action. Will the Government provide an equally strong response?


This post was written by Beth Woroniuk. She is an independent consultant on gender equality and women’s rights and is based in Ottawa. Follow her on Twitter @BethOttawa.
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

P is for Preventing Conflict Sexual Violence… Or is it?
June 10 2014

by Doris Buss

The UK Government is throwing the largest, global party on ending conflict sexual violence in London, and the guest list is impressive with, according to the latest publicity, “113 countries, 70 ministers, and over 950 registered experts” in attendance, not to mention Angelina Jolie and other celebs.

I've been thinking about parties and conflict sexual violence. It's an admittedly odd combination; there is a celebratory feel to the event in London that seems out of step with the subject matter. But, perhaps this is exactly what it is needed; a big, loud, upbeat gathering that insists on change. It's certainly a novel approach, and if it produces substantive initiatives to generate change to the high rates of conflict sexual violence, then what’s not to like?

But it's those words – “substantive” and “change” – that are tricky, and this is where the issue of the guest list comes in. Its not just who has been invited (or not – and full disclosure: my name appears to have been overlooked. A simple bureaucratic oversight, no doubt), but also which concepts are in play in the conversations, and which have been omitted (by bureaucratic oversight or otherwise).

Two concepts seem to be strangely absent from the UK’s event on sexual violence: prevention and gender. The London event follows from the UK government’s “Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative”, or PSVI. The P in PSVI seems to have gone missing. From what I have seen, there is very little focus on actual prevention, compounded by the fact that there is also a rather limited approach to sexual violence, and the different forms it takes in relation to armed conflict.

The “Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict”, promoted by the UK government in advance of the London fête (with Burma the 151st country to endorse it), clearly signals that the focus is really on one type of sexual violence: sexual violence used ‘as a weapon of war’; an intentional strategy with a designated purpose to destroy or attack a community.

What is wrong with a focus only on this form of conflict rape? Doesn't this topic warrant increased attention, even an international party, to stimulate a
much-needed global response? The problem with focusing on just ‘rape as a weapon of war’ is that it is too narrow, overlooking the full extent of gender and sexual violence connected to armed conflict and which carries the danger that partial or ill-advised ‘solutions’ will result. The research on conflict sexual violence suggests there are multiple forms of sexual violence and varied categories of perpetrators and victims, needing a range of responses. ‘Rape as a weapon of war’ refers to one particular form of sexual violence that became a concern of feminists and international policy markers largely in relation to the patterns of sexual violence found in the 1990s wars in the former Yugoslavia and the 1994 Rwanda genocide.

But, research on more recent conflicts, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, suggest other kinds and patterns of sexual violence that do not necessarily match ‘rape as a weapon of war’, either in terms of orchestrated intentionality, the centrality of rape to forms of violence, or the rigidity of categories ‘perpetrators’ and ‘victims’. For example, while 40 percent of women, and 24 percent of men in the DRC reported sexual violence by militias in conflict zones, 71 percent of Congolese women reported experiencing domestic violence. Another study found that sexual violence wasn’t just the preserve of soldiers and militias in the DRC, civilians, “including supposed sources of moral authority, such as teachers, pastors, priests, catechists, and peacekeepers” were also perpetrators. Finally, a UK-study found that 85% of women experiencing post-conflict sexual violence in Liberia knew the perpetrator.

These and other studies point to a complex range of factors that shape the patterns of sexual violence experienced in relation to conflict, and the range of factors that position women and men, girls and boys, as vulnerable to sexual violence. These studies also suggest that the post-conflict period continues to be a dangerous time, where gender norms and relations, as well as the experiences of sexual violence during conflict, continue to powerfully shape women and men's security.

Yet the focus on ‘rape as a weapon of war’ seems to stand in for all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, and this might explain why ‘solutions’ to conflict rape, to the extent they are mentioned at all, seem to be narrowly focused on criminal prosecutions and increased policing. If prevention is strangely absent from the pre-London discussions I’ve seen, than punishment is over-represented.

But punishment is a poor substitute for prevention, and any suggestion of their correlation must be closely studied. Certainly, ending impunity is important, but the
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Over-attention to legal solutions in country-level interventions is generating its own, problematic dynamic. In the context of the DRC, one study suggests that legal responses to sexual violence, including by internationally funded 'mobile courts', are being "misused" to address other social or familial disputes (and provide a means to "get someone out of the way") and are raising concerns that the basic principle of 'innocent until proven guilty' is being compromised. The point here is not that a focus on criminal prosecution is necessarily wrong, but that it is not the silver bullet donors may be hoping for.

Legal, particularly criminal, responses are also likely ill-suited to addressing the complex range of factors impacting on conflict-related sexual violence rates. Chris Dolan, in a 2010 International Alert study on sexual violence in the DRC identified a number of priority areas for affecting substantive change to the conditions in which sexual and other forms of gendered violence unfold, some of which are on the table at the London event, such as developing a system of collecting and documenting data on sexual violence, and strengthening legal institutions. Importantly, Dolan also emphasizes the importance of addressing the role of changing gender relations, the need to address extreme poverty and the management of resources, and the leadership role of community organizations. Prevention is more than simply prosecution.

The events in London are exciting and the diversity of participants always offers the possibility that something surprising might happen. In my wildest dreams, the London event concludes with both 'prevention' and 'gender equality' making a surprise guest appearance, to wild applause and mutual recognition. My day dream also includes a small vignette in which a courier arrives with my last minute invitation and a plane ticket to London….


Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014


This post was written by Doris Buss, an Associate Professor of Law and Legal Studies at Carleton University and a member of WPSN-C.
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Watye Ki Gen Joins Women in Solidarity in Northern Uganda
June 10 2014

The following post was submitted to the WPSN-C by Angela Atim Lakor, a young woman and peace-builder from Northern Uganda who has been working in collaboration with our member organization, Children/Youth as Peacebuilders (CAP). She will be in attendance at the Global Summit and will be delivering a presentation about her experiences being abducted and held by the Lord’s Resistance Army, her escape after eight years in captivity and the work she does fighting for the rights of female returnees and children born in LRA captivity.

“Our organization is called Watye Ki Gen – this is Acholi for “We have hope.”

Watye Ki Gen is a membership group - we are all formerly abducted females. We came together to develop a collective portrait of our experiences in the bush – called The LRA Forced Wife System. Then we decided we wanted to continue to work together and focus on children born in captivity.

We decided to work together because of what the children are experiencing.

When girls and women came back from the bush there were some people who were helping them with vocational skills and other programs. But no one came for the children who were born in captivity. This was needed because some of them have been psychologically broken, especially those who came back when they were six and above. They know what happened in the bush and they still have that memory that keeps them fearful. There is also the stigma against them; the children are often not welcomed in the school or with their neighbours. So the children were asking, “Why do people do this to us? Why do they hate us?”
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict

Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

They also have problems in their families: they often are not accepted. Some of the children really want to know where they come from, about their fathers. For many mothers this is difficult, they don't want there to be any connection to that biological father. But the children want to know - some will say, “I know that my father maybe died but I still want to know his family. However many bad things he did, he is still my father.”

At the start it was difficult. In the bush there were levels of wives and some of them mistreated others so much so there were a lot of bad memories and feelings amongst the women. Then when we started Watye Ki Gen we were working together, putting that history behind us. But that wasn’t easy to do.

Step by step, we started to realize that what happened amongst the wives in the bush was really a trick of Joseph Kony and the LRA system to control us, to ensure that no one could escape because everyone was watching each other. Now, the biggest benefits is that we understand that. Yes, people are still really wounded and hurt because of the past but when we talk it out we come to understand it.

I can say for myself there are some people on the committee who were cruel to me in the bush but right now we are one, we work together. And when others look at us and see how we are learning to be together, it encourages others to forgive and for women to be together. We are definitely a step ahead. That doesn’t mean that there are not problems, but we are learning to sit down, to talk something through together and to learn how to solve things ourselves – that is good.

We help each other.

It is useful for other women to see how some mothers are able to cope. There are difficulties but they keep on going on, so the mothers are learning how to talk to each other and get advice from each other. The committee has taken the step of doing home visits for those who are having trouble. We go and share and it is really so good, you feel at home with each other. Also, we have also started a system where if someone is sick then some other women from Watye Ki Gen will go to visit and to provide help. It is really so encouraging, especially for the women who were giving up.

We are starting to get more respect in the community. But it is still 50/50. People are beginning to understand why we are doing this and also to respect us as an organization.”
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

Photo: Young girls in northern Uganda face incredible barriers attending school due to the conflict in the region. Photo Credit: Project Trust, October 2009.

For more information about Angela’s work with Watye Ki Gen, please see this report published in partnership with Children/Youth as Peacebuilders (CAP).
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

After the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict -- Now what?
June 20 2014

This Summit is just the beginning. We must apply the lessons we have learned and move from condemnation to concrete action. We must all live up to the commitments we have made. Having come together we must move forward with a collective responsibility, showing leadership at all levels on ending sexual violence in conflict.

Chair’s Summary – Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict

The cameras have been turned off. The microphones are silent. Foreign Ministers have moved on to the next hotspot. Posters, reports and informatics have been boxed up.

And the activists have returned to what they were doing before the Summit – working for change, for peace and for justice.

Positives and yet questions

The UK’s Foreign Secretary Hague said that he wanted a summit like no other. And it looks like he got it. The Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict was held in London last week. It brought thousands of activists, government officials, journalists,
Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

experts, academics, and celebrities together and certainly raised the profile of the issue.

On the positive side, the Summit saw the launch of International Protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict, a tool outlining best practices. Leaders signed a Statement of Action. A global network of survivors of sexual violence was launched: Survivors United For Action.

The Summit was also an opportunity for activists and experts to exchange ideas, meet and learn.

However, there were also questions and more critical voices. The International Campaign released a statement expressing disappointment that the Summit ended with few tangible results. Nobel Laureate Jodie Williams lamented the exclusion of civil society organizations from the ‘official’ discussions. Our own WPSN-C blog included reflections from Carleton University professor Doris Buss on prevention, gender and limiting the focus to ‘rape as a weapon of war.’

Even though money doesn't solve all problems, it is clear that resources are needed. On this front, there were surprisingly few announcements.

Nothing new from Canada

And what of Canada? Calls for the Government of Canada to take strong positions and meaningful steps were met with a half-hearted response. Yes, Minister Baird did chair a session and yes, he signed the Statement of Action. Yes, various Canadian officials, including the Canadian Ambassador to Afghanistan, spoke.

However, there were no new announcements, no new commitments, no new initiatives.

There were no indications that Canada would reverse its current position of refusing to fund the full range of reproductive health services to survivors of violence, as called for in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2122.

Unlike other countries, Canada did not make the links between the availability of small arms and light weapons, signing the Arms Trade Treaty and violence against women in conflict.
**Time to Act: blog series ahead of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict**
Originally published between June 2 and 20 2014

There were 2 DFATD media releases on Minister Baird's participation in the Summit. The [first release](June 11th) did not bode well for new Canadian initiatives, as Canada's contribution appeared to be limited to previously announced priorities:

“The time is now for the world to take action against sexual violence in conflict,” said Baird. “I look forward to bringing to the table Canada's approach to eliminating child, early and forced marriage and advancing women's political and economic empowerment.”

The [second release](quote) quoted the Minister: “At the summit, I met with foreign ministers, representatives of international organizations and experts in the fight against sexual violence,” said Baird. “We all agree that commitments must be turned into action to end sexual violence in conflict. It is time to act.” Not exactly a ground-breaking observation.

This same release noted that Canada is providing $537 million to support security, development and humanitarian projects in West Africa. Interestingly there was no information on if or how these initiatives support gender equality more generally or ending sexual violence in conflict more specifically.

**Moving Forward**

As the dust settles on the Summit, there will be more and more analysis of what it achieved and where it [fell short](quote).

Of course, major questions remains: Has there been a change in how the world responds to sexual violence in conflict? Are the links between gender inequality in peacetime and sexual violence during armed conflicts better understood? Are we prepared to look to demilitarization and peaceful solutions to conflicts?

As before the Summit, the most consistent drivers of change are the hard-working, under-resourced and often-threatened activists and advocates. Will they now have more space, more security and more resources to carry out their work? Will their voices be heard after the cameras are shut down and the microphones turned off?

---

*Beth Woroniuk is a member of the Steering Committee of the Women, Peace and Security Network – Canada. You can follow her on Twitter at [@bethottawa](#).*