



The red line initiative: women as weapons as war

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Throughout much of the world's history, three methods of warfare can be said to encapsulate the brutality and inhumanity of armed conflict's impact on civilians-starvation, pillaging, and rape and other acts of sexual violence. These tactics were not only regular tactics of war, but were viewed for much of history as perfectly acceptable. Over the past nearly century and a half, the world has undergone a massive moral shift that has translated into nearly universally accepted prohibitions on the tactics of pillaging and starvation. Yet, left behind has been the use of sexual violence as a method of warfare.

The red-line initiative is rooted in the belief that sexual violence as a method of warfare represents a violation of our shared humanity that can no longer be accepted as an unfortunate, but unpreventable part of armed conflict. Rather, it must be prioritized as a wholly unacceptable tactic that has no place in modern warfare, similar to starvation and pillaging.

Sexual violence in conflict violates the same principles as other prohibited methods, and its consequences are just as grave. Yet, despite numerous United Nations Security Council resolutions, a bold and timely response from the international community is lacking. Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008) demanded the 'immediate and complete cessation' of all acts of sexual violence in conflict. However, despite the clear demand to act, the international community reacts incoherently-in fact often choosing not to act at all. States are not held accountable, sanctions are not enforced, basic lifesaving services such as healthcare are underfunded, and impunity is the rule rather than the exception.

The importance of addressing this issue cannot be overstated. Sexual violence as a method of warfare destroys family ties, communities, and social norms, and inflicts harm over generations-for example through HIV transmission, the rejection of children born of rape, and collective psychological trauma. It robs victims and their families of their life potential

and disrupts schooling and livelihoods. In some conflicts 90% of the rapes are gang-rapes, often in public or in front of family members, and the use of objects or weapons to rape is routine resulting in injuries that are rarely seen outside the context of conflict.

In addition, sexual violence used as a method of warfare is also a method to carry out other international crimes and a recognised early warning sign of the risk that those crimes may occur, notably with respect to forcible displacement (ethnic cleansing when targeted at a protected group and not civilians as such) and genocide. Yet, despite its devastating impact, sexual violence in conflict is not explicitly prohibited in the same way as other methods and does not evoke the international outcry it deserves. We propose an International Convention for the Elimination of Sexual Violence as a Method of Warfare=The Redline.

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