



COMITÉ DE LA CONDITION DE LA FEMME, GENEVE
NGO COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, GENEVA



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Statement on CSW57 Priority Theme: Elimination of Violence against Women

Rape is a crime!

In the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the UN General Assembly in 1993 formally recognized women's right to live free of violence.

Violence against women is defined as any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. While sexual violence refers to any act involving forced unwanted 'sex acts', unwanted sexual intercourse. While both men and women can be victims of violence, violence against women, often at the hands of men, is a unique category of violence that relies on the historical and current unequal balance of power between men and women, boys and girls. Sexual violence against women is a universal phenomenon that affects millions of women and girls worldwide with rape as the most common manifestation¹.

Rape is any non-consensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration of the victim's body parts by objects using force, threats of bodily harm, or by taking advantages of a victim by body parts or objects using force, threats of bodily harm, or by taking advantage of a victim who is incapacitated or otherwise. It is more likely to occur in societies with rigid and traditional gender roles and men are more likely to commit sexual violence in communities where sexual violence goes unpunished and where concepts of male honor and entitlement are culturally accepted. Rape is fraught with patriarchy.

Although sexual violence and rape in particular are considered the most under-reported violent crimes in the world, a UN statistical report, compiled from government sources in 65 countries showed that more than 250,000 cases of male-female rape or attempted rape were recorded by police annually². The term "sexual and other forms of gender-based violence" comprises not only rape and attempted rape, but also sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, forced early marriage, domestic violence, marital rape, trafficking and female genital mutilation³. A WHO multi-country study found that between 15 and 71% of women aged 15 to 49 years reported physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. One in 3 women on the planet will be raped in her lifetime⁴. Dating violence and sexual assault have also been reported to affect 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 6 boys by the time they are 18 years old⁵.

Societal risk factors that contribute to the perpetration of this crime against women include gender-based inequality, lack of women's bargaining power, war, and absent or weak sanctions. Other risk factors for being a perpetrator also include low education, past exposure to child maltreatment or witnessing violence in the family, harmful use of alcohol, attitudes accepting of violence and gender inequality including women's lack of bargaining power.

Cultural values that restrict women's control of resources including control on their own bodies cause women to accept such violence as normal. These factors are rooted in social injustices and inequities and transcend geographical boundaries.

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We advance women's rights and empowerment with priority focus on:

- *Rights, Peace and Justice*
- *Economic Empowerment & Employment*
- *Displacement and Migration*
- *Women's Health*
- *Violence Against Women and Girls*

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According to the UN Secretary General, while most societies prohibit such violence, the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned. Gender Based Violence is a complex problem embedded within the broader socio-economic, political and cultural context with traditional norms influencing its likelihood⁶.

It is acknowledged that poverty increases people's vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation in the workplace, schools, in prostitution and sex trafficking. In many countries sexual violence is not recognized as rape by law and this sometimes makes it difficult to effectively measure its incidence.

In general the World Health Organization estimated that in 2002 150 million girls under the age of 18 had experienced sexual violence of which school-based sexual abuse was a major concern. Other circumstances in which rape occur include early and forced marriage. Every year an estimated 10 million girls are married before they reach 18. Child marriage cuts across countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities: 46% of girls under 18 are married in South Asia; 38% in sub-Saharan Africa; 29% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 18% in the Middle East and North Africa; and in some communities in Europe and North America too. Trafficking in women is another phenomenon that provides opportunities for sexual violence against women. The ILO has estimated that more than 43 % of people trafficked across borders are used for forced commercial sexual exploitation, of whom 98 % are women and girls⁷. Finally, sexual violence during armed conflict has existed for as long as there has been conflict. Mass rape of women and girls has been used as a weapon of war in many conflict-affected areas to terrorize and undermine communities, forcing people to flee, and to break up community structures. Refugees and internally displaced people are at extreme risk for sexual violence in their new settings, including refugee camps⁸.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence against women result in physical, mental, sexual, reproductive health and other health problems, and may increase vulnerability to HIV. In recent times we have seen rape result in death as an indirect consequence. The effects of violence against women, which can appear in the short run or long run, also include pain, suffering and premature death, for which there is no imputed monetary value in the economy. Violence against women also impacts other areas such as Justice, Health, Social Services, Education, Household Costs, Business and Employment. Irrespective of the type of violence or its effect on the individual victim, it also has an impact on society, directly or indirectly. For instance, it is difficult to accurately measure the costs associated with fear although strategies have been developed to measure pain and suffering or loss of life.

We, members of the NGO/CSW in Geneva, therefore call upon Governments and other stakeholders to enforce legislation to protect women, and to prevent and respond in a timely manner to cases of sexual violence including rape against women. We call for a strengthening of strategies that address gender inequalities irrespective of the circumstance or culture. We call for an end to impunity and the denial of the rights of victims. Sexual assault is not about lust and desire; it is a violent crime of power, control and dominance⁹. We appeal to the decision makers to ensure reforms needed to protect women, ensure access to justice, end impunity and advance their rights.

Thank you.

References

¹ <http://www.un.org/rights/dpi1772e.htm>

² https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/CTS12_Sexual_violence.xls

³ <http://www.who.int/hac/techguidance/pht/SGBV/en>

⁴ Intimate partner and sexual violence against women, WHO Fact sheet N°239, November 2012

⁵ <http://www.childrensafetynetwork.org/sites/childrensafetynetwork.org/files/TeenDatingViolenceasaPublicHealthIssue.pdf>

⁶ <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTHEALTHNUTRITIONANDPOPULATION/EXTPHAAG/0,,contentMDK:22421973~pagePK:64229817~piPK:64229743~theSitePK:672263,00.html>

⁷ http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/news_events/9.1_news_archives/2009_03_27/Story_Survey_Final.pdf

⁸ Intimate partner and sexual violence against women, WHO Fact sheet N°239, November 2012

⁹ <http://www.rwu.edu/campus-life/health-counseling/counseling-center/sexual-assault/rape-myths-and-fac>