

WNCAC Event

Gender-Based Violence:

The Effects on Children in Areas of Conflict

29 September 2010

10AM-12PM

*Search for Common Ground
1601 Connecticut Ave, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20009*

Overview:

The Washington Network met on September 29, 2010. The focus was on gender-based violence and its effects on women and children in areas of conflict. The aim of the session was to share challenges faced by practitioners in this area of work together with best practices know to the presenters. The discussion was forward-looking and participants were encouraged to share their views on challenges and best practices also.

Both **Abigail Erikson**, a licensed clinical social worker and the Caring for Child Survivors Specialist for the International Rescue Committee and **Tobie Whitman**, the Special Assistant to the Director of The Initiative for Inclusive Security, made presentations on this theme.

The session focused particularly on how violence against women was used as a weapon of war. Both speakers stressed the need for the international community to respond to sexual violence with prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation programs. Ms. Erikson spoke about how sexual violence as a weapon of war is a strategy to instill fear, stigmatize women, and pollute bloodlines. She spoke of her experience of sexual violence along the Thai-Burma border and how rehabilitation treatment programs must be sensitive to the local culture. Ms. Whitman took more of a policy focus in her presentation, looking at how the UN was responding to the use of rape and other kinds of sexual violence in conflict situations. She pointed to the recent UN Resolutions 1820, 1888 and 1325 which have made rape a war crime, and highlighted that violence against women is a threat to national security and sets out processes for women to be more involved in peace processes Ms. Whitman also discussed the role of women as peacemakers and how specifically NGOs need to respond to gender-based violence.

A discussion followed the presentations highlighting the role of religious leaders, the notions of survivors of sexual abuse and what needed to be done moving forward to address the causes and consequences of sexual violence. Various resources such as the UN Information Center in Washington D.C. and general news topics such as the 2010 Women PeaceMakers Conference and Universal Children's Day were discussed before the meeting was adjourned.

Presentations

Abigail Erikson: Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Caring for Child Survivors Specialist for the International Rescue Committee, has worked for the International Rescue Committee (IRC)

managing gender-based violence response and prevention programming in two Burmese refugee camps along Thai-Burma border.

In response to the need to provide field staff working in conflict and post-conflict settings with specific skills and knowledge of working with child survivors of sexual violence, Abby recently took up the position in IRC as the Caring for Child Survivors Specialist, based in Washington D.C.

Highlights of her presentation:

- The main focus on girls but violence also affects young boys.
- Statistics:
 - 20 million children forced to flee their homes because of conflict and human rights violations
 - 80% of women and children participants self identified as victims of GBV in Sierra Leone.
- Large amount of gender-based violence in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border due to refugees being restricted to the camps by the government. The majority of the youth in the camps were born and raised as refugees.
- Types of gender-based violence include domestic violence, rape, sexual violence and exploitation, trafficking of women, female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage, and wife inheritance.
- Examples of such negative consequences are posttraumatic stress syndrome, shame and guilt, social stigma, isolation, HIV, STDs, pregnancy, and degrees of intimacy severed.
- The international community must continue to chip away at gender-based violence by address children's rights through media networks and establishing ground level reproductive health care services as well as longer term prevention and rehabilitation centers for families.
- Her main conclusion was that the most important thing that could be done to prevent such violence was to strengthen the family unit

Tobie Whitman, PhD: Special Assistant to the Director of The Initiative for Inclusive Security.

- Currently conducting a study of joint protection teams and other civil-military tools to promote protection and address gender-based violence in the DRC after recently completing a study with Women for Women International to evaluate women's experiences of conflict in North and South Kivu.
- Previously worked as a Senior Conflict Specialist within the Office of Military Affairs at the USAID and with the Institute for Inclusive Security where she focused on enhancing women's participation in peace processes in Uganda and in security sector reform in Liberia, as well as on developing training modules on themes in gender, peace and security.

Highlights of her presentation:

- Examples of gender-based violence include forced incest in the DRC, rape leading to an increase in HIV cases in Rwanda and Sudan, and forced pregnancies in Bosnia.
- These Numbers are often underreported:
 - 200,000 survivors of sexual abuse in the DRC alone in recent past years.

- WHO reported in Liberia 40% of sexual abuse cases were committed by a soldier.
- The United Nation Security Council Resolution 1820 is an extremely important resolution as it condemns the use of rape and other kinds of sexual violence in conflict situations, stating that rape can amount to a war crime or a crime against humanity.
- The international community must support women as peacemakers.
 - Chilean president Michelle Bachelet to head United Nations Women (UN Women), a recently created entity to manage all of the world body's programs designed to promote women's rights and full participation in global affairs.
- Tobie talked about a range of initiatives undertaken by the UN to address this issue – some examples of best practices include Joint Protection Teams, all women patrols by UN Peacekeepers, increases in the % of women in the police force, attempts to increase the participation of women in peacebuilding processes and recent USAID RFP on HIV/ Aids and Sexual Violence
- NGOs need to respond in the field with culturally sensitive, detailed protection plans which identify local authorities and vulnerable areas, keep in constant contact with the local community, and include more females in the process of irradiating sexual- based violence.

Discussion Session

There were a range of questions and points raised by the participants in the meeting,

These included:

- The responsibility of the international community in providing interventions to prevent rape being used as a weapon destroying community ecology.
- The responsibilities of religious leaders in relation to gender-based violence (in supporting survivors of sexual abuse and promoting access to reproductive services and in helping to identify survivors of gender-based violence and promote a healthy relationship with aid organizations).
- The importance of calling those affected by gender-based violence '**survivors**' as opposed to '**victims**' (survivor empowers the individual affected by sexual abuse. The label 'victim' keeps the power in the hands of the abuser).
- The challenge of including men in addressing the problem of sexual abuse (men not included and not called to account).
- The need for Health services need to include psychological health programs which do not impose western ideas but are culturally sensitive and build on local customs and traditional healing ceremonies and techniques.

Resources and Announcements

- Universal Children's Day on 20 November 2010
 - The interns of the United Nations Information Center will be hosting an event on November 20th for Universal Children's Day. The event which has been titled "Kick it for the MDGs" would consist of a short mini-camp hosted by University soccer players followed by 8 scrimmage soccer matches. Hoping to host the event

at the Marie Reed Learning Center in Adams Morgan though this has not yet been confirmed. For more information contact:

- Alexis.simon-landa@unicwash.org as she is the coordinator for the event.
- Contact Stephanie Dellarocca for general information about the UN Information Center in Washington DC. Stephanie.Dellarocca@UNICWASH.org
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325: 10-year anniversary at end of October.
- There will be a Secretary-General's report on 1325 at end of Oct. Date to be confirmed. On 28 September 2010, there was a conference on 1325's progress. The conference site will host webcasts of the sessions.
- Upcoming Conference: “Precarious Progress: U.N. Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security”
 - The 2010 Women PeaceMakers Conference coincides with a momentous year, marking both the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 10th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. In anticipation of these celebrations, the goal of this working conference will be to develop, distill and disseminate expert opinion from practitioners and policymakers of all levels. Delegates will reflect on the implementation and challenges of UNSCRs on women, peace and security (1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889) and analyze their practical considerations.
 - Date: September 29 – October 1, 2010
 - Location: Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA
 - Registration Deadline: 13 September 2010
 - Link: http://www.sandiego.edu/peacestudies/ipj/programs/women_peace_makers/conferences/precarius_progress/index.php
- The Secretary-General's report on UN Security Council Resolution 1820 will be released in Dec. 2010. Contact Elisabeth Roesch Elisabeth.Roesch@theIRC.org

Please see the following resources on the WNCAC on the website:

- Abigail’s Powerpoint Presentation