



Women and War



ICRC

The purpose of this report is to provide an update of the ICRC's actions since the publication of the *Women facing War* study and the subsequent commitment to the identification of and response to both the general and specific needs of women affected by conflict.

Women and War

Special Report



ICRC

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Preface

The specific situation of women affected by armed conflict was one of the issues addressed by the 27th International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference (Geneva, October 1999). The ICRC took this opportunity to pledge that it would take appropriate action to assess and address the specific protection, health and assistance needs of women and girls affected by armed conflict to alleviate the plight of the most vulnerable. It insisted on the need for all parties to a conflict to respect women and girls, and emphasized that all forms of sexual violence are prohibited.

Despite a full panoply of laws to protect women in war, including international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, women continue to suffer unnecessarily in wartime, because the laws that are meant to protect them are all too frequently not respected and/or implemented. The ICRC is determined to increase its efforts to ensure that these laws are implemented and it will continue to strengthen, where necessary, its action in favour of women affected by armed conflict.

The title of the ICRC study on the impact of armed conflict on women, and the accompanying video, is *Women facing War*. For the ICRC, this title summed up the fact that women are *faced* with the day-to-day consequences of hostilities in trying to go about their lives, and *facing* the dangers, obstacles and losses in trying to hold together their lives and those of their families, as well as the fact that some women *face* war as members of armed forces or groups. The *Women facing War* study describes the numerous initiatives that the ICRC has undertaken to try to ensure and reinforce observance of legal instruments designed to protect women and girls affected by armed conflict and is endeavoring to ensure that its conclusions and recommendations are translated into action.

Just as the situation faced by women in wartime varies from place to place and from context to context so too do the responses needed to assist and protect women who have suffered or who are suffering from their exposure to war. The situations and contexts faced by these women are often unique and each needs to be assessed in its own right; programmes therefore are often required to be tailored to the specific realities that the ICRC encounters in its assessments in the field. In practical terms this means, for example, that a programme in one country to assist women who have survived sexual violence may not be appropriate in another country (and sometimes even within different parts of the same country).

The ICRC's commitment to Women and War is just as strong - if not stronger - today than it was in 1998 when the study was initiated. Its work for women facing war will continue. Yet, the fact remains that women are suffering unnecessarily in wartime. Why? For the simple reason that the laws to protect them, of which there are many, are all too frequently disregarded. The challenge is to increase respect for and implementation of these laws.

Charlotte Lindsey
Head of Women and War Project

The Study

Background and methodology

Three years ago, the ICRC conducted a study aimed at improving its understanding of the specific impact of armed conflict on women. The study, known as *Women facing War*, assessed the needs of women in war, the protection provided for women by international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, and ICRC activities on behalf of women throughout its worldwide operations.

The study was published in English in October 2001 and later published in French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian. Based on this work, the ICRC drew up a plan of action that focused on helping it implement the findings of the study (and its pledge), with the desired effect being the improvement in quality, relevance and impact of ICRC programmes.

The ICRC study *Women facing War*, focused on such issues as physical safety, sexual violence, displacement, access to health care and hygiene, food, water and shelter, the problem of missing relatives and its impact on survivors, access to personal documentation, access to sources of livelihood, as well as the situations of detention and internment.

General conclusions of the *Women facing War* study

- Women should not be considered solely as “victims” or “vulnerable”
- women experience armed conflicts in a multitude of ways
- international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law afford protection according to the needs of women in situations of armed conflicts
- women suffer in war today not because of an absence of law, but because of the lack of implementation of, and/or respect for, existing laws
- sexual violence is unacceptable and not inevitable. There needs to be a much more

- comprehensive response to sexual violence
- it is important to involve women in the assessment, implementation and evaluation of programmes and activities carried out in their favour
- in its focus on women, the *Women facing War* study does not negate the needs of men
- in the waging of today’s war, parties to armed conflict are more and more often not distinguishing between combatants and civilians. The blurring of this distinction risks an unacceptable spiral towards “total war” (i.e. any civilian, solely through their presence in an area where war is being waged, risks being targeted by a party to an armed conflict.)
- access to victims and conflict-affected areas is absolutely essential in order to try to put a stop to violations and/or to try to bring assistance and protection to affected persons.

The study concluded that: women are not solely “victims” or “vulnerable” in need of protection and assistance. It drew attention to the fact that women take part in armed conflicts as members of the regular armed forces or armed groups and in their support services. This means that women in such circumstances cannot be automatically labelled as “vulnerable”. Women are also politicians, leaders of non-governmental organisations, social and political groups, and active participants in peace campaigns.

As members of the civilian population, women have important, and often crucial, social and household economic roles, as well as skills that enable them to deal with the increased stresses and burdens placed on them in wartime. For example, women have initiated small enterprises and income-generating projects with meagre resources within their devastated communities and within camps for the displaced. Women in wartime show tremendous courage and resilience as survivors and as heads of households - a role that many of them have had little or no preparation for and which is made more difficult by the social constraints often imposed upon them.



A woman enjoys a quiet moment with her child at an ICRC distribution point

The vulnerability of different groups - whether male, female, elderly or infant - will differ, according to their exposure to a given problem, their capacity to deal with it and its impact on the group concerned. Vulnerability, as such, does not fit into an easily determined category or definition - especially where women are concerned. It is therefore in accordance with the specific nature of each situation and the different factors involved that groups of women could be identified as being particularly at risk and in need of special assistance, e.g. pregnant women, nursing mothers, widows, mothers of small children or female heads of household.

It should also be recognised that women are particularly susceptible to marginalization, poverty and the suffering engendered by armed conflict, especially when they are already victims of discrimination in peacetime. Women may be particularly vulnerable if they are held up as "symbolic"

bearers of culture and ethnic identity, as well as the producers of the future generations of their community. In such situations women may be vulnerable to attack or threats from their own community for not conforming to this role. Conversely, an adversary may target women in an effort to subvert or destroy their function in this role. Victims are often reticent, as well, to speak about or to report incidents of sexual violence. Many times, when such a crime becomes known, women can be ostracized from their community and even risk injury, imprisonment or death.

The study determined that, on the whole, international law adequately covers the needs of women in situations of armed conflict, when the three bodies of law - international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law in particular - are taken together. This means that sexual violence, in all its forms, as well as indiscriminate attacks, violence and threats are prohibited under interna-

tional humanitarian law. Why then are women subjected to such violations? The issue in reality is that this law is all too frequently ignored; therefore, the difficulty lies in assuring its implementation and respect.

Furthermore, the study determined that the need to assure protection for women taking no active

part in hostilities must be better disseminated to all parties to an armed conflict, armed forces, security forces and police forces. This law needs to be better understood, enforced and respected. In addition to trying to prevent sexual violence, more needs to be done to assist and support those who are victims of such violations.



Women gather together in prayer at a memorial service dedicated to their missing relatives

Plan of Action

The plan of action – drawn up as an internal tool to implement the findings of the Women facing War study - focused upon three main goals:

- The specific needs, including protection, health and assistance, of women and girls affected by armed conflict are appropriately assessed and addressed
- International humanitarian law – and in particular the protection accorded to women and girls affected by armed conflict – is promoted to as wide an audience as possible
- A guidance document for the needs, including protection, health and assistance, of women and girls affected by armed conflict, is produced to guide ICRC programmes and to be presented to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference in 2003.

The publication of the study, the adoption of this plan of action, as well as the pledge made to women by the ICRC, highlights the ICRC's continued commitment to improving its response to the needs of women affected by armed conflict. Through this plan of action the ICRC is applying the study findings to help improve, where necessary, the quality, relevance and impact of ICRC programmes.



Implementation

The ICRC is already doing much around the world and in the different Divisions at the ICRC headquarters in Geneva to improve the situation of women affected by armed conflict. The ICRC's Women and War Project has already responded to requests from ICRC delegations around the world to conduct assessment missions, assist programmes and to help to address issues concerning women. In carrying out specific assessments, the ICRC endeavours to ensure that the necessary steps are taken to identify and consider the general and specific protection, health and assistance needs of women affected by armed conflict. For example, the ICRC is endeavouring to develop and strengthen its response to the needs of victims of sexual violence to ensure that they receive appropriate reception, advice, protection, medical care and follow-up. Additionally, implementation of this plan of action includes consideration of the needs of women and the inclusion of women in programmes for tracing missing relatives and reuniting families, assistance programmes for food, water and hygiene, sources of livelihood and shelter.

Further to a review of its dissemination literature and training materials, including the messages disseminated by the ICRC in relation to: (a) the protection of women, and (b) sexual violence, communication guidelines were created and circulated throughout the ICRC, thereby allowing new materials and literature to take its recommendations into consideration.

A series of fact sheets, posters and videos has also been produced highlighting the various ways in which women are affected by armed conflict, promoting the relevant rules of war pertinent to women, including the prohibition of sexual violence. Additionally, a series of audiovisual communication tools (see Annex) was produced at both the ICRC headquarters and in its delegations in the field promoting and raising awareness of the impact that war has on women. Specifically tailored awareness campaigns have been conducted through many ICRC delegations, including the regional delegations of Dakar, Pretoria, Yaoundé, Nigeria, Buenos Aires and Moscow.



A woman talks with an ICRC delegate, surrounded by the rubble of her destroyed house



Women gather at an ICRC distribution point in the early hours of the morning, waiting to receive their share of food and non-food assistance

An assessment of the ICRC's Integration Course, which orients all new staff members concerning the ICRC history, programmes and mandate, was also undertaken to look at how it addressed issues related to women and to sexual violence. Following this, the course is in the process of being revised. The object was not to create a new module regarding women in this orientation procedure, but to better integrate any issues relating to women affected by conflict and sexual violence into the ICRC's overall training on its mandate and programmes.

Externally, the Women and War Project has given more than fifty presentations throughout the world to further foster awareness of and adherence to the protection afforded to women by international humanitarian law. Representatives from organizations and governments worldwide, whose activities and policies can affect the plight of women victims of armed conflict, have participated in ICRC-organized seminars on this issue.

Also, three times a year, the Women and War Project conducts the Women in Conflict module of the UNITAR/DPKO¹ training course, offered to

international peace support personnel in various locations throughout the world.

Important to note is the institutional integrated approach that is employed by the ICRC. In practice, this means that an inter-departmental approach is favoured whereby specific responsibilities for ensuring concerns and issues related to women are integrated throughout the ICRC's four existing programme areas – assistance; protection; cooperation within the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement; and preventive action – rather than being the sole responsibility of one department. The goal is to integrate fully, across the range of programmes, the general and specific needs that affect women caught up in armed conflict. A major ongoing component of this approach is to sensitize ICRC staff to a level where the awareness of the ways women are affected by armed conflict and their needs is an integral part of everyday work. The aim is to cultivate a heightened awareness and 'planning reflex' that better includes, addresses and integrates the needs of women affected by armed conflict into operational planning and priorities.

¹ United Nations Institute for Training and Research / Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Implementation through ICRC delegations worldwide

Over the last three years, the ICRC has already made considerable efforts to put into practice the general findings and conclusions of its study. In the following section, and in relation to the conclusions of the study, can be found, a *selection* of actual examples of how this work has been translated into concrete action on the ground:

Women experience armed conflicts in a multitude of ways

War - whether international or non-international - causes enormous suffering for those caught up in it. The *Women facing War* study demonstrates that women experience war in a multitude of ways - from taking an active part as combatants to being targeted as members of the civilian population or because they are women. War forces women into unfamiliar roles and necessitates the

strengthening of existing coping skills and the development of new ones.

For example, little is known of the situation of women in detention, however the *Women facing War* study draws attention to the plight of women deprived of their liberty. The ICRC is conducting programmes throughout the world in order to improve their situation.

Special programmes have been set up and carried out for the authorities and other organizations, in which ICRC participates in training programmes of the detaining authorities. The purpose of these sessions is to inform prison directors and specialized female staff of the general and specific needs and requirements of female detainees.



Amanda, imprisoned for her role as a combatant in an armed conflict, copes with life behind bars



Women queue patiently during a family visit to a prison

In particular, the ICRC actively assesses the conditions of detention of women in respect to international standards of human rights and international humanitarian law. Specifically, the ICRC tries to ensure:

- that women are efficiently protected from inhuman or degrading treatment
- appropriate detention conditions exist for women and that any specific conditions for mothers with children are met
- women are detained in separate quarters from male detainees
- women are guarded by female staff
- the presence of female prison staff and that they are appropriately trained to deal with female detainees
- women have the possibility to maintain contact with their families, and where possible, receive family visits
- judicial guarantees are fully respected.

In the context of its activities for women detained in connection with armed conflict or internal disturbances the ICRC has also provided guidance for its delegates aimed at helping them to recognize issues specific to women in detention. This

guidance is routinely given to ICRC delegates whose work encompasses visits to places of detention. The ICRC's health and assistance activities have also been the subject of particular attention, and the ICRC will continue to do its utmost to respond to women's particular needs in an effective way.

In **Yemen** special attention has been placed upon the assessment of the physical and psychological condition of women detainees. Specifically, the ICRC regularly visited a number of detained women with the aim of reducing their isolation, following up on previously administered medical care and organizing vocational and literacy training.

In collaboration with the prison authorities in **Colombia** the ICRC is carrying out innovative health promotion and prevention activities among the female prison population in Bogotá, Medellín and Bucaramanga. In particular, the programme addresses the problem of breast cancer by conducting regular clinics to detect or treat the prevalence of the cancer among women inmates. To date some 90% of the inmates have participated in this programme.

The ICRC is endeavouring to support women in strengthening existing coping mechanisms through such initiatives as economic programmes for the benefit of women and their households.

In **Sierra Leone** since the year 2000, a programme sought to address the fact that sixty thousand (60,000) women were affected by the conflict in the Western Area, Tonkolili, Kenema, Pujehun and Kailahun Districts. The objective was to restore their traditional economic activity and enhance their income generating capabilities through associative vegetable production. Additionally, the programme aimed to improve the diet and maintain the pre-war food security levels of the families.

The ICRC identified women's associations interested in participating in these economic programmes. It was also important to ensure self-sustainability of the programmes by training

women in the techniques of seed multiplication (replicating seeds for the continued sowing of further crops), and to address, in an integrated fashion, the women's needs in terms of training and materials for vegetable growing. These programmes offered women affected by the conflict two basic benefits. Firstly, community-based vegetable seed support. During 2000-2001, through a total of 917 co-operative associations 71,442 women received vegetable seeds and tools, to restore and enhance their traditional economic activity. Secondly, training was necessary to maintain self-sufficiency. Representatives of each of the women's associations were trained in vegetable growing and seed multiplication techniques through one-week workshops. Then, during 2002, 415 women's associations in eastern Sierra Leone were assisted with the same programmes, through the joint efforts of the ICRC, the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society and the Ministry of Agricultural.



As part of an ICRC training project women tend to their crops, producing vegetables that provide a stimulus for the local economy and contribute towards self-sufficiency

A range of other ICRC programmes is addressing this issue, such as in:

- **Sri Lanka** – where a programme has been instigated to benefit female-headed households and widows, and to assure they have the economic means to sustain their families and live in decent conditions
- **Eritrea** – a programme has been conducted to help women affected by the armed conflict to leave camps for internally displaced people and to resettle in decent housing conditions, specifically by providing the means and materials to rebuild homes
- **Ethiopia** – where work is underway with the local authorities and local community leaders to address the needs of women affected by violence in conflict prone areas. The resulting *Village Health Programme* ensures that women have access to health care and trains women in basic hygiene and to identify the most common health problems
- **Rwanda** - female victims of the 1994 genocide and the internal conflict have been encouraged to come together in associations and are then supported through small scale, agro-pastoral projects. Being united in associations has contributed to improving these women's access to governmental technical services, while serving to strengthen the solidarity among these survivors of conflict.

International humanitarian law (IHL), human rights and refugee law afford protection according to the needs of women in situations of armed conflicts.

The problem is a lack of implementation of, and/or respect for, these laws.

The protection of women in armed conflict is adequately addressed in international law. If women are suffering in situations of armed conflict it is not because of a lack of laws protecting them but because these laws are not implemented and/or respected. The general and specific protection to which women are entitled must become a reality.

In **Jordan**, Her Majesty Queen Raina Al-Abdullah of Jordan launched the Arabic version of *Women facing War* to several hundred representatives from the political, military, diplomatic and

academic circles. The event received extensive coverage in national and regional media.

In **Sierra Leone**, a dissemination initiative was designed to inform approximately 100 women about the essential concepts of IHL and gain their commitment to promoting IHL within their associations, their families and communities and to emphasize the message of child protection, particularly against their participation in war.

In **Somalia**, women now provide an important source of information on their particular needs in terms of protection, while also constituting a reliable relay for spreading knowledge of the basic rules of IHL. It has been the goal of the ICRC to help women be the driving force behind this wider dissemination programme.

In **Syria**, a 'Women and War Week' was held in 2002 which centred on increasing the understanding about the wide range of ways in which women are affected by conflict. During this cultural week in Damascus, and in a continuing effort to promote 'apolitical' debate on the issue, a round table was held on the impact of war on women from the perspective of Syrian women writers. These public events attended by the diplomatic and academic communities provided a platform for dissemination of the issues highlighted by the *Women facing War* study and received excellent media coverage.

The study concludes that it is important to reiterate whenever and wherever possible that sexual violence is unacceptable and not inevitable and that there must be a much more comprehensive response to sexual violence.

Prohibitions of rape and other forms of sexual violence stipulated in international humanitarian law must be included in national law and in the military codes and training manuals of arms bearers. Sexual violence is prohibited against men, women, girls or boys. Breaches of this law and of instructions given to arms bearers must be appropriately addressed. Rape is preventable; this must be recognised and realized.



"This man had a gun. And he had the power. I just wanted my life to be spared".
Sarah, a civilian caught up in the armed conflict in her country, and a survivor of sexual violence, recounts her horrific experience to an ICRC field worker.

Further to increased efforts to put an end to violations of international law, there must be a strengthened capacity for monitoring violations against women, such as sexual violence. Victims of sexual violence need rapid access to appropriate and adequate medical and health care (including pre- and postnatal care for those who have become pregnant) and may need counselling. In order to avoid the risk of ostracism or punishment because they have been the victims of sexual violence (a very real risk in many communities), victims need an appropriate environment in which to relate and report their experiences. Their situation needs to be handled confidentially and sensitively, taking into account their cultural background.

In **Algeria** since 1999, the ICRC, together with the Algerian Red Crescent Society, financed the establishment of eight sewing and embroidery workshops for women. Ongoing today, this project has enabled hundreds of women to learn sewing and embroidery, thus creating additional skills and an economic means to help the participants. Of these women it was estimated that 20%

had been direct victims of violence. ICRC delegates visited some of these workshops to assess the effectiveness and application of these learning sessions, and their findings underlined the necessity for this programme. The ICRC has been intent on extending this programme through other activities designed to assist survivors of violence and to involve psychologists more in working together with the women. In an initial assessment, an ICRC psychiatrist concluded that women who experienced violence were best treated in an environment that allowed them to mix with others who had not endured such trauma.

In **Burundi** - a programme was initiated to closely involve local organizations to support women who have suffered acts of sexual violence as a result of conflict. Some 60 traditional birth attendants have been trained to identify victims of sexual violence and to be able to give them a suitable medical response, and if required, to refer the women to appropriate organizations for further care and support.

Importance of involving women in programmes and activities carried out in their favour

Women should be involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of assistance programmes carried out in their favour in order to increase knowledge of their specific problems and needs and to implement controls to ensure that women are not being exploited or abused to be included as beneficiaries. Such involvement of women can afford them better protection and assistance as specific concerns related to women can be raised and addressed throughout the programme life cycle.

Currently, in its **Afghanistan** operation, the ICRC is making determined efforts to better integrate women in the design and implementation of its various programmes. A team of ten ICRC female hygiene promoters work on a daily basis carrying out awareness sessions to households in Kabul; eleven women engineers are working in the water and sanitation programme country-wide; a team of female mine awareness instructors operate through schools and clinics reaching women at risk in mine-contaminated communities; and the ICRC orthopaedic centres have teams of women physiotherapists (in accordance with its employment policy) working with disabled female patients.

The ICRC Mission in **Kosovo** organised a round-table on how women can play a positive role in preventing and reducing the level of violence in their communities. Such initiatives demonstrate that, just as women have sometimes directly participated in armed conflict, they also have been central to the implementation of the reconciliation and reconstruction processes. The round-table took place at the ICRC office in Pristina, and participants included representatives from NGOs and key personalities from Kosovo civil society representing various communities – one of the first times that members of both communities had sat around the same table since the end of the conflict.

In the breakaway Georgian region of **Abkhazia**, where 75% of the ICRC's beneficiaries are women, assistance and protection programmes are planned and implemented by an ICRC team, which has a 75% female staff.

Access to victims and conflict-affected areas is absolutely essential

The ICRC's experience of working in situations of armed conflict was vital in carrying out the *Women facing War* study not only in understanding the impact that war has on women but in relation to the operational responses that have had an impact in bringing assistance and protection to those affected by war.

States have the responsibility to care for their citizens. As their needs are often not met, civilian populations in situations of armed conflict need to be able to reach and be reached by international humanitarian organizations, like the ICRC. Unfortunately, organizations such as the ICRC are sometimes denied access to areas where and when the worst abuses against protected populations are taking place either because of the refusal of the relevant party to the conflict to grant such access or because of threats to or attacks upon personnel. Negotiating access to those in need is a sensitive and crucial aspect of the provision of protection and assistance for victims of war, calling for dialogue with all parties to the conflict. It is essential that access to populations affected by armed conflict and conflict-affected areas is provided for international humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC in order to improve the situation of women affected by armed conflict.

The distinction between combatants and civilians is becoming more and more blurred – an unacceptable spiral towards “total war”

Civilians are increasingly placed at the heart of conflicts, endangered because of the proximity of the fighting, deliberately targeted and often actively mobilized or forced to choose sides. It is accepted that there are limits to warfare, yet those limits are regularly breached, and women are now increasingly at risk. The thinking on *Women facing War* leads the ICRC to a fundamental question: How can we secure respect for the distinction between civilians and combatants in tomorrow's wars in order to prevent the progressive widening of the scope of violence? The purpose of this reflection is to try to ensure better protection for all.



A physiotherapist helps a mine victim to regain her mobility at an ICRC orthopaedic centre



A mother and child, survivors of a recent conflict, bravely deal with life in a camp for amputees



A young woman, anxious for news of her missing brother, a captured soldier, looks through a family photo album for comfort

The Women facing War study does not negate the needs of men

It is important to note that in focusing specifically on the needs of women and not those of men, the study in no way intends to negate the particular needs of men and men's suffering in wartime or to infer that women *hors de combat* suffer more than their male counterparts. Indeed, it is not so easy to separate the impact of armed conflict on women from the impact of armed conflict on men, as they are members of the same families and communities, and the effects on the two groups are closely linked. It must not be forgotten that men too are civilians, and many do not take up a role in conflict situations. Furthermore, men are often targeted specifically, for example, for arbitrary military conscription through mass round-ups of young men to serve on the front line, arbitrary detention, and disappearance or summary execution. In reaching this conclusion the ICRC is not backing away from a commitment to the

needs of women in wartime, but reinforcing its commitment to a "gendered" approach through recognition that the impact of war on women is inextricably tied to the impact of war on men². This is not to deny that women face terrible hardships in armed conflict or have their own specific needs and vulnerabilities. On the contrary, it is to recognise that the fate of women can be improved if humanitarian law is fully implemented and respected with regard to both combatants and non-combatants, be they male or female.

One pertinent example of this approach is in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** where the needs of women survivors of the conflict are particularly significant when addressing the broader issue of 'the Missing', that is, those unaccounted for as a result of the war. Women have mobilised across the country in order to jointly present their concerns, through the ICRC and other means, to the authorities responsible so that they provide those left behind with news on the whereabouts of their

² "Gender" refers to the socially defined or constructed roles, attitudes and values which societies and communities assign as appropriate for one sex or the other.



For women like Dzidza, who for years are anxiously searching and waiting for news on the whereabouts of their missing relatives, the ICRC 'Book of Belongings' is often one of the best options left

loved ones. ICRC has worked extensively on this issue, organised numerous round tables, public information campaigns and conferences in order to keep the issue of the Missing on the agenda – always mindful of the explicit needs of those, mainly women, left behind who need to be able to carry on with their lives, comforted with knowledge of the fate of their loved ones.

In particular, in February 2003, the ICRC convened a landmark International Conference on the Missing issue which brought together, from more than ninety countries, some four hundred governmental and non-governmental experts, including members of family organisations, and ended with a strong call for action to clarify the fate of people missing as a result of armed conflict and internal violence and to support their families. The conference reaffirmed that the families of missing persons need material, financial, psychological and legal support. It directed particular attention to women and children who may find themselves in situations of acute destitution and distress. The final success of the conference will be determined by the extent to which the

measures adopted will be made known and applied by governments and international and national non-governmental organizations.

It is important to note that the ICRC's "all victims approach" is the right approach for it to be able to respond to the needs of women. Neither the *Women facing War* study, nor the pledge previously mentioned, alter the ICRC's "all victims approach" - to provide a comprehensive response to the needs of all populations affected by armed conflict. The aim of both is to reinforce this response through a better understanding of the needs and particular vulnerabilities of certain categories of victims, in this instance women. Maintaining the "all victims approach" is important for the ICRC so as to be in a position to come to the aid of those most in need. The special focus on women through the *Women facing War* study helped the ICRC to increase that understanding, and to identify more precisely or more appropriately those members of the female population who are amongst the most at risk population (or potential victims) of war.

Resource Allocation

Funds donated to the ICRC for programmes assisting and protecting women may be dedicated to individual projects with women as the sole or specific target group, such as in Sierra Leone (see p.15) or alternatively, for programmes where women are not necessarily the sole beneficiaries, such as in Afghanistan (see p.18). The ICRC is endeavouring to ensure that through better

understanding and development of existing programmes, by more comprehensively designing and implementing ICRC projects, that women can be directly and rapidly assisted and protected. This approach has proven both sound and effective, in terms of direct benefits to women affected by armed conflict and to the better use of resources.

Challenges Ahead

The ICRC is already doing a lot for women affected by armed conflict by providing assistance and protection for women affected by armed conflict or internal disturbances in countries throughout the world. Displaced women, detained women, women heading households made particularly vulnerable by hostilities, women in need of protection from threats or violence, those searching for their missing relatives and those in need of medical, food and material assistance are seeking out - or are being sought out by - the ICRC.

The ICRC is concerned about all the violations to which women are subjected - indiscriminate attacks, forced displacement, disappearances - and is endeavouring to strengthen its operational responses to such violations. Since undertaking the study, the ICRC has realised that it could do specific dissemination among arms bearers in relation to the needs of women, activities for survivors of sexual violence, further development of existing expertise in protection activities for persons hors de combat, and by referring women to organizations that can provide appropriate assistance. In its continuing efforts, particular focus is being given to programmes responding to the violation of sexual violence, for example, by trying to prevent its future occurrence through dissemination to parties to an armed conflict and with regard to advice and assistance to its female and male victims. The ICRC's activities to make international humanitarian law better known by all parties involved in armed conflict and to monitor

and ensure the respect for that law are vital, as knowledge of the law is an obvious prerequisite for its respect. Thus, dissemination programmes are placing, and will continue to place, greater emphasis on the protection that humanitarian law affords women.

The ICRC is currently formulating a guidance document that aims to be a working tool for practitioners to ensure the provision and delivery of appropriate programmes and services to, and with, women affected by armed conflict. This document will be finalised in 2003 and presented to States and National Societies at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference in December 2003.

In 2003, the ICRC will evaluate its work carried out to date in relation to women and war. The aim is to assess the impact of the implementation of the pledge through ICRC operations and at its headquarters. The evaluation will allow ICRC to identify the successes and weaknesses in the implementation process thereby contributing to shaping its future work, and improving policy and programme design and implementation in relation to the needs of women affected by armed conflict.

The ICRC is endeavouring to do its part but everyone must be made responsible for improving the plight of women in times of war, and women themselves must be more closely involved in all the measures taken on their behalf.

Annex - Women and War material currently available

Women facing War study

The ICRC study *Women facing War* is an extensive reference document on the impact of armed conflict on the lives of women. Taking as its premise the needs of women, e.g. physical safety, access to health care, food and shelter, etc. in situations of armed conflict, the Study explores the problems faced by women in wartime and the coping mechanisms they employ. A thorough analysis of international humanitarian law, and to a lesser extent human rights and refugee law, was carried out as a means to assess the protection afforded to women through these bodies of law. The Study also includes a review of the ICRC's operational response to the needs of women as victims of armed conflict.

ICRC, Geneva, 2001, 274 p., 15,5cm x 23cm

English, Arabic, French, Spanish and Russian / CHF 45.- / ref. 0798

Women and War fact sheets

A promotional folder with eight fact sheets, which can be ordered individually or as a set. These fact sheets cover various problems faced by women in wartime, including physical safety, sexual violence, detention, missing relatives and displacement. Each fact sheet describes a particular problem, highlights the protection afforded by international humanitarian law and how the ICRC responds.

ICRC, Geneva, 2001, A4

English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian / Free of charge / Folder including 8 fact sheets: ref. 0797K

Women and War posters

A complement to the Women and War fact sheets, this series of five posters graphically highlights some of the difficult situations faced by women in armed conflict. They aim to create greater awareness of some of the specific problems faced by women - Sexual Violence, Detention, Displacement, and Missing Relatives, as well as to demonstrate the resilience of women in wartime through the poster on Support & Dignity.

ICRC, Geneva, 2001, A1

English, French, Spanish, Arabic / Free of charge / ref. S2000.01 - S2000.02 - S2000.03 - S2000.04 - S2000.05

Women facing War video

Series of 11 x 3 minutes films

Eleven women tell their own individual stories of how their lives have been affected by war. Coping with displacement, physical and sexual violence, missing relatives, widowhood, detention... challenges and difficulties that these and thousands of other women must face in their daily lives.

Filmed in the Middle East, Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

CR-F-00685 An Urban Films Production for ICRC, Geneva, 2001, Running time: 11 x 3-minutes

English, French, Spanish, Arabic available; Russian to be produced / CHF 30.-

Working with Women in War video

While the ICRC works to help all victims of conflict without distinction, its work around the world recognizes the specific needs of women facing war. This 10 minute film shows how the ongoing work of the ICRC benefits women affected by armed conflict shown here in the areas of emergency relief distribution; support for families with missing relatives; protection; health care and economic assistance.

CR-F-00686, ICRC, 2001, Running time: 10 min. 30 sec.

English, French, Spanish, Arabic available and Russian to be produced / free of charge.

Articles from the International Review of the Red Cross

Women and war by Charlotte Lindsey (Sept. 2000, No. 839)

The protection of women in humanitarian law by Françoise Krill, (Dec. 1985, No. 249)

Special protection of women and children by J. de Preux, (Oct. 1985, No. 248)

The detention of women in wartime by Charlotte Lindsey, (June 2001, No. 842).

Afghanistan: An ICRC perspective on bringing assistance and protection to women during the Taliban regime by Charlotte Lindsey Curtet (September 2002).



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