



ICRC IN SOUTH SUDAN

NEWSLETTER

April 2016

Sexual violence: the fight against a tragic and taboo scar of South Sudan's conflict

An unwanted pregnancy. Exposure to HIV. Physical pain. Psychological scarring. The risk of social isolation. Lower likelihood of marriage. Perhaps worst of all, forced marriage with the perpetrator. Countless conflict-related rapes have occurred across South Sudan in the last year alone in locations where fighting has taken place.

The potential consequences of rape and other forms of sexual violence in South Sudan for the overwhelmingly female victims (men also suffer attacks) are heartbreaking and long-lasting. Neither youth nor advanced age provide protection from such attacks. One victim the ICRC has met with was only 4 years of age.

When sexual attacks happen, victims go to great lengths to mask the assault. One rape victim whom the ICRC assisted walked two days from a refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia to a health clinic in Upper Nile. She had already lost her husband in the conflict, and before making such a difficult journey on foot she had to arrange for someone to care for her four children. And she felt she had to do so without telling anyone she had been raped, because of the stigma she would suffer.

“Sexual violence shatters communities and rips family bonds apart in provoking deep shame for the victim as well as devastating levels of psychological torment”, said Aurore Brossault, in charge of mental health and psycho-social support at ICRC in South Sudan. “How can mother and child keep the same relationship if the child had been forced to witness the mother’s rape? It is unimaginable!”

Even if nearby assistance is available – since wide swaths of South Sudan have no functioning medical facilities – the social stigma is so severe that too many choose not to seek help.

A lot of victims do not know that medical assistance can prevent disease and unwanted pregnancy. Victims fear that their case will not be treated confidentially. And there is a general misunderstanding from the victims and the authorities whether victims of sexual violence need first to report their case to the police before seeking medical treatment.

Education is important to avoid stigmatization. Last year the ICRC held sexual violence awareness building sessions with hundreds of South Sudanese including health staff, birth attendants, local leaders, police officers, members of armed groups and volunteers of the South Sudan Red Cross Society.

This year the ICRC will seek to address with communities the stigma that serve as barrier to access care and will stress the importance of looking for assistance as quickly as possible. The support provided by the ICRC is tailored to the needs of the victims. If a person reports a case within three days, we can provide medical treatment to prevent HIV, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. After three days we will be able to treat sexually transmitted diseases only. Psychosocial assistance is available at any stage.

The prohibition of rape is one of the oldest and most basic rules of war. The Geneva Conventions clearly prohibit it in both international and non-international armed conflicts. ICRC in South Sudan is working with armed groups across the country to remind them of their obligation to spare civilians from harm. Sexual violence must never be a tactic wielded in conflict.

We seek to break the taboo that surrounds the victims and prevents too many women, girls, men and boys from seeking the medical and psychological assistance that is so critical to recovery.

The ICRC works together with the South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC) to help the communities most affected by the conflict face the future with more confidence. With a presence in Greater Upper Nile, Greater Bahr el Ghazal and the Equatorias, South Sudan is the ICRC's largest operation in Africa.

To help people build **resilience** and in response to their most urgent needs the ICRC and the SSRC have:



Provided **15,000** people with **seeds and farming tools** and **10,000** with **fishing kits**
Delivered **household essentials** for more than **31,000** people
Distributed over **180,000 food rations**



Vaccinated nearly **80,000** heads of **livestock**
Treated **60,000 animals** benefiting nearly **90,000** people
Provided **training** and veterinary kits to **60** community **animal health workers**



Ensured access to **safe drinking water** for **40,000** people
Installed or rehabilitated **17 water points** across the country

To support the access to **health** and **surgical care** the ICRC has:



Supported **6 health facilities** benefiting more than **200,000 patients**
Performed nearly **1,100 surgeries**
Conducted more than **29,000** outpatient **consultations**



Provided **antenatal care** for **1,900** women, safe deliveries for nearly **200** and more than **3,500 vaccine doses** for children under one year old



Assisted **650** people with **disabilities**
Evacuated nearly **100 weapon wounded**

To support the **detention** authorities adhere to international standards the ICRC has:



Visited more than **4,300 detainees** throughout the country
Improved **living conditions** for over **2,000** detainees

To help **reconnect families** separated by the conflict the ICRC and SSRC have:



Facilitated nearly **8,000** phone **calls** between **family members** across the world
Distributed more than **200** Red Cross **messages**
Allowed more than **250** people to locate and **get in touch** with their love ones

To promote knowledge and respect for **International Humanitarian Law**, the ICRC has:



Trained on IHL over **1,200** members of **armed groups** from both sides of the conflict

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



ICRC