



**ALLIANCE  
for  
DIRECT ACTION AGAINST RAPE IN CONFLICTS and CRISES  
(AllianceDARC)**

## INTRODUCTION

The scale of sexual violence<sup>1</sup> - predominantly against women and girls<sup>2</sup> - in current armed conflicts around the world has been graphically illustrated in recent reports<sup>3</sup> and campaigns by many advocacy groups<sup>4</sup>. Accurate statistics are not available - but an estimated<sup>5</sup> minimum of 2 million women have been raped or subjected to other forms of sexual violence in wars around the world since 1990. In several recent and current conflicts, surveys have suggested that the *majority* of women in particular settings - especially displaced and refugees - have been raped<sup>6</sup>.

**Sexual violence is a brutal crime.** It is a means of warfare when used to torture, injure, extract information, degrade, intimidate and punish individuals, families, and communities, in association with an armed conflict. Rape has also been used to bring about "ethnic cleansing" of an area by spreading fear and compelling people to leave. Rape and other forms of sexual violence committed during armed conflicts is prohibited under international humanitarian law, as enshrined in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols of 1977; This is also a war crime under the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

"Look at me. I lost my dignity, I lost my possessions, I lost my marriage and I lost my womanhood. Do you understand what I am going through? I lost all that I ever owned and worked for."  
-Raped Liberian woman

Several factors increase the risk of sexual violence for women in situations of armed conflict<sup>7</sup>: Women are often unaccompanied while their male relatives are fighting, have fled, are detained or missing. Women are usually unarmed and unable to resist their armed attackers who

<sup>1</sup> Sexual Violence is understood in terms of rape, and also encompasses: forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, forced impregnation, forced maternity, forced termination of pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, indecent assault, trafficking, inappropriate medical examinations and strip searches.

<sup>2</sup> Though sexual violence directed at men also occurs in situations of armed conflict, over 95% of reported incidents and cases are directed against women and girls.

<sup>3</sup> *Women in an Insecure World*. Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> such as Amnesty International, ICRC, IRC, MSF and others

<sup>5</sup> Personal estimate by the author of this note - subject to refinement in ongoing work.

<sup>6</sup> For example, stated in reports from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Darfur region of Sudan.

<sup>7</sup> ICRC Factsheet on Sexual Violence

may also, at times, be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and obeying instructions from their military or political superiors. Poor women in lawless environments are rendered vulnerable such as when venturing out for firewood or queuing for food. In many cultures, women are held as symbolic representatives of ethnic, caste, or national identity. Hence the defilement of women is an assault on their entire community, and is viewed as a means of intimidating, provoking, or demoralising their men folk.

## FOCUSING FOR ACTION

A culture of sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation is widely prevalent around the world: at least one in three of the world's female population has been either physically or sexually abused at some time in her life<sup>8</sup>. Addressing this needs action on many fronts, sustained over a long period of time, in view of the underlying social, cultural, educational, economic, political and other factors that predispose towards sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation.

"We were fleeing to another peaceful place and fell into an ambush. All the women were given internal body cavity searches (mostly done by soldiers). They were manhandling us, putting their fingers roughly inside the vagina looking for money. Many of us bled a lot. From then I usually experience pain during sexual intercourse."

Against this general backdrop, the vulnerability of women in war is particularly acute. A widespread culture of impunity prevails in many current conflict situations where levels of rape have reached epidemic proportions. **This requires specifically focused action on an emergency basis.**

Therefore, a programme of collective response by governments, civil society, international organisations, and others is needed focusing on the **goal of elimination<sup>9</sup> of rape in war, with an intermediate target of reducing prevalent sexual violence in armed conflict by at least 50% in the period to the end of 2008.** This would equate<sup>10</sup> to preventing at least 100,000 new rapes and sexual assaults associated with armed conflict per annum by 2008, at the same time as bringing treatment, care and support to around 1 million women who have suffered from sexual violence in armed conflict over the previous three years, and have not received such attention. **To make a real difference, a quantum shift in our collective ambition, attitudes, and approach is needed.**

## WHAT IS *AllianceDARC*?

Several organisations of the United Nations and Red Cross/Red Crescent systems and NGOs are concerned with developing programmes against sexual violence, from the perspective of their respective mandates. Their efforts

"I was raped by two boys about the age of my grandson. It's one year later and I haven't gotten over it; I am sick; I don't have money. I don't know what to do."

<sup>8</sup> Population Reports (1999): Ending violence against women

<sup>9</sup> The emphasis of this Programme is on rape in armed conflict ie. organised sexual violence by belligerents and in circumstances where national or international protection measures are currently absent or inadequate.

<sup>10</sup> Personal estimates by author: subject to refinement in ongoing work.

- in advocacy, assistance, protection and prevention - need to be intensified. Current efforts to bring synergy to scattered efforts, by coordinating them through a global campaign, deserve strong support.

At the same time, **global approaches are not sufficient**. Much more needs to be done to extend the range of endeavours to reach the thousands of women threatened or affected by sexual violence in myriad conflict situations around the world.

The **Alliance for Direct Action against Rape in Conflicts (AllianceDARC)** seeks to extend and expand existing approaches through a strong field service orientation. Thus the Alliance's mission is quite simple and straightforward **ie. to bring practical help to women suffering from or threatened by sexual violence in conflict situations, and thereby prevent such further violence.**

## WHAT WILL AllianceDARC DO?

The Alliance does this through supporting **direct targeted action** - with four strategic objectives to:

- **Rebuild** broken lives
- **Redress** wrongs and bring personal safety
- **Report** reality
- **Reduce** future sexual violence, especially through mobilising Men

*Underpinning our direct action philosophy approach is the belief that the best way to protect the vulnerable, and deter future sexual violence is to start with practical help to women directly touched by actual or threatened sexual violence in conflict situations.*

### Rebuilding broken lives

Current rape survivors - many tens of thousands of them caught up in wars and conflicts - receive little or sustained assistance because conventional programmes have limited coverage or are difficult to access by beneficiaries.

*AllianceDARC helps raped women to quickly recover their physical health, re-establish emotional and mental equilibrium, repair social links with those around them, reduce stigma, and restore self- confidence- so as to face the future with dignity and self-respect.*

The Alliance does this by supporting local partners in the expansion of tailor-made provision of healthcare, psychosocial, and livelihood support - so that survivors and their dependents / families can get easy "user-friendly" help in these areas. Elements of practical help - depending on the specific circumstances of individuals - include targeted healthcare including reproductive health and HIV prophylaxis, psychological and peer group support, and imparting skills and economic assistance to make a new living.

"Before giving me food I had to suck his penis and let myself be raped."  
- abducted woman taken forcibly as " wife" of rebels to provide sexual services and domestic work

## Redressing wrongs and bringing personal safety

Most raped women in most circumstances of armed conflict have no means to get heard, and no access to justice. Where legal remedy and protection are theoretically possible, the rule-of-law system works perversely to add insult to injury. Most other women caught up in conflicts but who have not yet experienced direct sexual violence live in daily fear of this, for themselves or for their children.

*AllianceDARC helps to re-establish access to personal justice for raped women, and to foster personal safety and security for women at serious risk of sexual violence in conflict situations.*

The *Alliance* endeavours to do this through two main approaches:

- ❖ First, we support local partners to develop a mechanism for identifying, investigating, and seeking legal action in rape cases with the aim that *all reported cases would be registered and followed up in some way (with the informed consent of those affected), so as to promote a culture of "zero tolerance"* in the relevant conflict situation. Where the rule-of-law machinery is systematically failing or obstructing justice, specific detailed analysis will be made publicly available so as to motivate improvements.
- ❖ Second, we seek to mobilise volunteers (mostly from within the country - but may include international volunteers too) to live in the community alongside women-at-risk, to provide practical witness *and protection-through-presence*.

## Reporting reality

There is widespread impunity. Prevalent attitudes range from denial of the magnitude of the problem ("*it is not that bad*"), to aggressive rejection ("*it is an outside plot or propaganda*"), disbelief ("*we don't do these things in our culture*"), desensitisation or resignation ("*what do you expect - these things happen in wars*"), blame transference ("*peacekeepers are also doing it*"), helplessness ("*so what?...we cant do anything about it while the fighting continues*") and a downright sense of hopelessness or even cynicism ("*they will get away with it - as always*")...

*AllianceDARC will independently ascertain and disseminate specific facts, figures and analyses in a way that will focus attention on situation-specific causes and the precise response and prevention measures required there.*

The *Alliance* will do this through setting up a new-style sexual violence reporting system that will collate data from various sources, and gradually, as data coverage improves, provide a population based picture of the prevalence and determinants of sexual violence. The methodology is based on a validated population-based approach that will be set to examine sexual violence in relation to *setting, context, perpetrators, vulnerabilities, risks, and outcomes*. It will have certain predictive value and enable a focus on vulnerabilities in parallel with an understanding of the intent of perpetrators. **It will permit early recognition of**

"The community called down a curse on us and outcasted us. They laughed at us. They talk about us all around. Some feel sorry for you. Some do not. It depends on the way it

**trends and thus be useful as a protection and prevention tool.**

The envisaged reporting system will rely on and simultaneously strengthen the network underpinning this *Alliance*. Thus it will also help to identify women who have suffered from sexual violence, partner agencies that can help them, and provide context-specific practical support to both. In turn this will enhance access to a group that finds it difficult to come forward. Thus, **the assistance and reporting components of this strategy will be mutually reinforcing** - expanding outreach coverage for both objectives.

### **Reducing sexual violence**

Many groups are conducting strong advocacy campaigns raising global awareness. A particular feature is the limited involvement of men as leaders, advocates, and activists against sexual violence: **their involvement is crucial.**

*Alliance*DARC will mobilise and motivate Men to play an active role in the campaign against sexual violence in conflict situations.

The *Alliance* will do this through a community and media -based approach to reach men in conflict affected countries where rape is a particular feature of prevalent conflict. The campaign will be tailored to specific cultural and social circumstances, drawing on insights from local partners and the reporting system described above. An intended consequence is to encourage a culture shift in prevalent norms and to create a supportive climate for the efforts of local partners of the *Alliance*. The campaign will also seek to involve the active support of men in countries where *Alliance* members are receiving support.

"My husband was forced to hold one of my legs when four men were raping me. He did not divorce me because he felt he participated in the rape somehow. We are not sharing the bed. He doesn't even touch me. He said I am a whore. It pains me a lot. He goes with young women now.  
- sexual violence survivor still living with her husband

### **HOW DOES *Alliance*DARC FUNCTION?**

The Alliance was initiated in 2006 at the inspiration of Dr Mukesh Kapila, formerly at the United Nations and with the UK Government Department for International Development (DFID). His experiences in Sudan, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and elsewhere motivated this call for more direct and concerted action.

The Alliance welcomes individual and institutional members. Collaborators include:

- The Aegis Trust
- Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA)
- The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre)
- the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)
- the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP)
- the International Centre for Migration and Health (ICMH)
- the International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI), and
- World Vision International (WVI).

Support is also coming from members of the public in many countries, as well as from international organisations, private sector and government donors. Major initial funders include the Government of Sweden, Pfizer Inc. and the Pears Foundation.

The *AllianceDARC* has a small office in Geneva where it is registering as a charitable association. It will also be registered in the UK and USA. It has minimal staffing to maximise resources for practical action in the field.

**For more information please see [www.alliancedarc.org](http://www.alliancedarc.org) or contact the Alliance Coordinator, Nichole McGarry at [nichole@alliancedarc.org](mailto:nichole@alliancedarc.org) +41 79 830 4223 or at AllianceDARC, IOM - 1.103, 17 route des Morillons 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland.**

**If you would like to help or join *AllianceDARC*, please complete the support form or send the information requested there, by email to: [membership@alliancedarc.org](mailto:membership@alliancedarc.org). Alternatively, you can become a member and make donations online: [www.alliancedarc.org](http://www.alliancedarc.org)**

Individual Membership: The standard annual membership subscription for individuals is US\$100, and those who can afford to do so, are encouraged to contribute more. The membership subscription can be reduced or waived for low income members who are otherwise contributing to the work of the *Alliance*.

Institutional Membership: Institutions and groups who subscribe to the objectives of the *Alliance* are also invited to join. There is no institutional membership fee, but contributions are welcome.

## SUPPORTING THE ALLIANCE

### INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP

I would like to support the *Alliance for Direct Action against Rape in Conflicts and Crises*. My contact details are as below.

Name:

Email:

Contact Number:

Address:

PLEASE SELECT:

\_\_\_\_\_ *I would like to join as a member and wish to contribute a membership subscription of .....covering ..... years, and an additional contribution of.....*

*(Total :.....).* PLEASE INDICATE CURRENCY IN WHICH YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE. BUT DO NOT SEND MONEY. YOU WILL BE CONTACTED WITH THE APPROPRIATE PAYMENT MODALITIES.

\_\_\_\_\_ *I would like to join as a member but I am unable to make a financial contribution at this moment. I MAY/ MAY NOT (please delete as appropriate) be able to do so in the future.*

\_\_\_\_\_ *In addition, I can also help the Alliance in the following way:*

### INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIP

NGOs, civil society groups, corporate bodies, clubs, associations and other entities who wish to join the *Alliance* as institutional members are invited to write to the Coordinator requesting membership, outlining the work that is done by their organization, and indicating potential areas of co-operation and financial or other support.