

# **VICIOUS** **circles**

**sexual violence against young people  
in Cambodia, Colombia and Northern Uganda**



**CHILDREN/YOUTH AS PEACEBUILDERS**

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in Cambodia, Colombia and Northern Uganda**


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**a study conducted by  
Children/Youth as Peacebuilders (CAP)**

with the assistance of the  
Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)



Canadian International  
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de  
développement international 

# FOREWARD



“That is when I had the problem.” Anna, from Cambodia, is describing the time when she was sexually assaulted by a neighbor. Like many victims, she does not like to use the word “rape” – it sounds too harsh and absolute. And, as girls in Cambodia and other countries know, revealing these experiences can have terrible consequences for both Anna and her family. So, perhaps this is a compromise, her way of ‘naming’ what happened, a code word for something that many would like to ignore.



**This is impossible.** There has been an explosion of sexual violence in today’s armed conflicts. And reports from civil wars confirm what many fear – these violations are only increasing. Military groups have integrated sexual violence into their arsenal of weapons and found it to be an effective tool to achieve their objectives.



In the Democratic Republic of the Congo villages are routinely attacked by rebel groups and all the females – young and old – are assaulted in the most brutal of ways. It is estimated that upwards to one million women and girls were raped during Rwanda’s genocide in 1994. Northern Uganda’s war, often described as a war against children, included the abduction of more than 40,000 boys and girls. Adolescent females over the age of 11 years were expected to serve as both soldiers and as the dutiful wives of commanders.

In the past there was an agreement that children should be protected from adults’ wars. This is no longer the case. Just as the world has developed extensive protocols and conventions to protect children, there has been a counter trend to abuse any and all of their rights. It is no exaggeration to say that today’s wars are fought on the backs and bodies of young people.

This study steps inside that world. The intention is to examine the nature, extent and impact of war induced sexual violence against young people. The research was based in Cambodia, Colombia and Northern Uganda. Each country and conflict has distinct characteristics that have shaped the vulnerabilities of young people inside combat and civilian situations. The fact that all three situations occupy a different point on the conflict-post conflict continuum has provided a useful point of comparison.

The project’s research was conducted with and by young people. Using their experiences as a reference point, they participated in

the elaboration of the study's questions, the identification of appropriate research methods and the implementation of the research. They also took part in special workshops to examine their own experiences of war. In all three countries, youth researchers assisted in the compilation and analysis of findings.

This project is part of international efforts to eliminate the war crime of sexual violence. This movement has been strengthened by the pronouncements of the UN Secretary-General, the strong interest of member states and the adoption of UN SC Resolutions 1612 and 1325. It is informed, amongst many others, by the work of (former) Senator Landon Pearson, Graça Machel and Radhika Coomaraswamy, UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, who are tireless advocates for young people and the development of policies and programs to uphold their rights. We hope this study will contribute to this work.

*Linda Dale,  
CAP Executive Director*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has relied on the generosity and participation of many individuals and organizations. We are extremely thankful for the different ways they have provided assistance, encouragement and support. This has included schools, IDP camp coordinators, municipal offices, NGOs and child rights organizations in all three countries where the research was conducted.

**In Northern Uganda**, the CAP Uganda group worked closely with World Vision Children of War, the Paibona (Awach) and Lalogi (Omoro) IDP camps; Kasubi and Kanyagogo (Bardege Division) parishes and the following schools: Pope John Paul II, Awach Secondary, Awere SS, Gulu High School, GCHS, SSBS, Sacred Heart, Police Primary, Pageya Primary, Laroo Boarding Primary, Mary Immaculate, Gulu Public and GPTC Demonstration. Many thanks to all those who were so helpful and generous with their time. The CAP Uganda group also involved child mother groups from both Gulu and the Awach area - thank you.

In addition to these consultations the project benefitted from the advice of many counsellors, community organizations and social workers. Amongst those, Florence Lakko, Charles Watmon and Mark Avola deserve special mention for their long involvement and support for girls in Northern Uganda.

**In Cambodia**, the research was coordinated largely by Oeung Kimunn who was always committed to the ideas of this project and efficient in helping to realize the project's needs. We also want to thank the various organizations that were so generous with their time including ECPAT, the Children's Committee, the Child Rights Foundation, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Committee, LICADHO, World Vision Cambodia Child Protection Program and COSECAM. Many, many thanks to the girls and boys who participated in the workshops.

**In Colombia**, the project's work was organized through the CAP Colombia Network. Participating organizations included: Dejala Ser (Pereira), Red Juvenil del Suroccidente de Barranquilla (Barranquilla), Red Juvenil del Central Cooperativa de Servicios Cencoser (Ocaña), Movimiento Juvenil Alvaro Ulcue (Northern Cauca), Grupo Juvenil Comunitario Semillas de Paz (Putumayo), Corporacion Foro Joven (Bogotá), Corporacion para el Desarrollo Picacho con Futuro (Medellin), Asociación cristiana de jóvenes ACJ-YMCA- (Ibagué) and Grupo Juvenil Soacha (Soacha). Special thanks to Eleanor Douglas, Alba Gomez Paola Andrea Gaviria, Liberto, Diego Alejandro Arango Henao and Carol Johanna Rojas Garzón for the extra energy and commitment they put into this work.

**In Canada**, the project is very grateful to Professors Wilfreda Thurston (University of Calgary Department of Community Medicine) and Shelley Whitman (Dalhousie University Centre for Foreign Policy Studies) for their collaboration and support. Many thanks to Ruth Naylor for her volunteer assistance and examination of issues relating to the ICC as well as Neil Collishaw for his wisdom and humour.

We are very grateful to the Strategic Policy Branch of the Canadian International Development Agency who provided support for this project. In addition a special mention and thanks belongs to several individuals inside CIDA whose assistance went “above and beyond the call of duty”. This includes Diana Rivington, Adrianna Wright, Michael Montgomery, Dennis Steubing and Emmanuelle Tremblay.

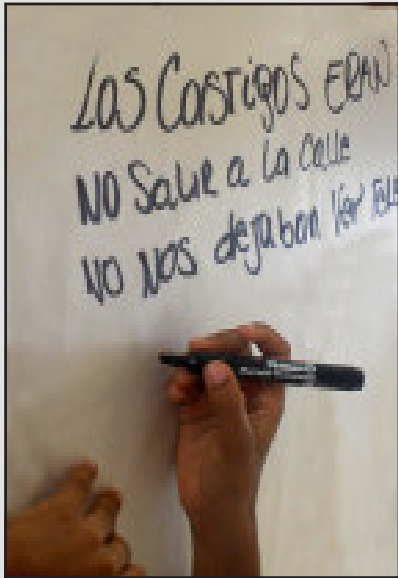
This project has benefitted greatly from the many feminist scholars and child rights activists whose ideas and commitment to the prevention of sexual and gender based violence have informed this study. On a personal level I would like to thank the friends, colleagues and family members who have continually encouraged this project - and its completion!

Linda Dale

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## ACRONYMS

AUC	Audtodefensa Unidas de Colombia
CODHES	Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento
COSECAM	Coalition to Address (Sexual) Exploitation of Children in Cambodia
CWCC	Cambodia Women’s Crisis Centre
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution, Abuse and Trafficking
FARC	Fuerzas Armada Revolucionarias de Colombia
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
ICBF	
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IOM	
LICADHO	Cambodian League For the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights
LRA	Lords Resistance Army
NGO	Non Governmental ORganization
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia
WFP	World Food Program



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## KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS



# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



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“The raping during an attack – no, it was not common.

I know many soldiers do this in war, but the system with the LRA was different. After they had abducted the girls, they would bring them to the commanders, to be at their disposal. Then they did the raping, but this was only for the officers.

For the regular soldiers, this was not available.”

*Charles Watmon, Northern Uganda*

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## 1. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG PEOPLE IS A FUNCTION OF THE MILITARY STRATEGIES OF LOCAL ARMED GROUPS AND THE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT.

The words “sexual violence” usually creates an image of rape. In war situations people think of armed groups swooping into a village, grabbing women and girls. The overall impression is of wild sexual license where any and everything is possible and few, if any, restraints are imposed on soldiers’ behaviour.

CAP’s research revealed that while these assaults do occur, sexual violence against young people is seldom a random act. Instead it is carefully and systematically planned and integrated into military objectives. This means that the violations usually occur over a period of time, rather than as a single assault.

Armed groups in Colombia and Northern Uganda have used sexual violence to terrorize populations; to provide services for commanders and to gain control over resources and people.

### Northern Uganda:

During this 21 year war, the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) abducted thousands of girls. Adolescent females were given as the forced wives of rebel commanders. Not only did this prove to be a useful reward for LRA officers, it also contributed to the LRA’s overall goal to destabilize the region.

The abduction and use of girls is one of the many atrocities the LRA committed against the Acholi people. Partly because of this notoriety, it is often assumed that their raids on villages included sexual assaults against women and girls. But such actions were forbidden, they were not part of the LRA’s operational plans as constructed by leader Joseph Kony. Soldiers found to have committed sexual assaults would be condemned for operating outside their orders and be severely punished.

### Colombia:

For the FARC, the guerilla force which began as the armed wing of the communist party in the 1960s, the approach is often utilitarian. The main focus is on pregnancy prevention (all female recruits are forced to use birth control) and the regulation of sexual activity amongst the troops (permission is required).



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**“Women and girls have had their heads shaved for wearing cropped tops, have been stripped naked and publicly humiliated for wearing shorts and threatened with punishment for wearing ‘low-slung’ jeans.”**

***Scarred Bodies, Hidden Crimes, Amnesty Report on Colombia***

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The AUC or paramilitary groups operate quite differently. Power over sexual activity is an essential part of their military strategies and their ‘machismo’ identity. They are determined to impose their vision of gender roles on the areas under their control. This requires that males exhibit stereotypical macho while females are expected to be passive, compliant recipients of male definitions of how they should look, act and relate to men.

Strict codes of dress are circulated with warnings that girls with short skirts will be punished. The double standard is alive and active here. While young females are required to be modest they must also be available to reinforce the masculinity of paramilitary leaders.

A girl who is chosen to be the girlfriend of a paramilitary operative understands that ‘no’ is an unacceptable and dangerous answer. Families have reported that their daughters are obliged to provide sexual services to these men. Payment for ‘protection’ can include the demand of a daughter’s ‘visit’ to local paramilitary groups. This constant sexual intimidation is a prime reason why families leave their homes, particularly in the rural areas. In fact it is a method that paramilitary groups have used to force people off their land.

This systematic use of sexual violence is not unique to these situations. Research studies by Burma refugees (Shan Human Rights Foundation, 2002) have documented cases where girls are taken and held in military barracks. Families are expected to pay a fee to recover their daughters who have often been raped and sexually mistreated. In the DR Congo armed groups are known to send messages to villages saying, “We will be raping your girls and women.” While sex is the weapon of choice, it is being used to achieve a military objective.

While most sexual violence is committed against females, violations are also perpetrated against male youth. From the information that CAP could obtain these violations are often oriented to making fun of their manhood. Boys from both Northern Uganda and Colombia described being forced to imitate sex in humiliating ways for the entertainment of their captors. In Cambodia, boys are also involved in the sex tourism business though they are not as prized as females. It is very difficult to get accurate information on these violations as they are shrouded in secrecy, though people will acknowledge that it is taking place. One example of this is the situation of the “tea boys” in Afghanistan.



## **2. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG PEOPLE IS INCREASING WITH EARLY ADOLESCENT GIRLS BEING A PREFERRED TARGET. THIS INCLUDES THE ACTIONS OF MILITARY GROUPS AND VIOLATIONS INSIDE CIVIL SOCIETY.**

### **Northern Uganda:**

World Vision Reception Centre records from 2000 – 2006 reveal that the majority of girls were abducted by the LRA at the age of 11 to 13 year as demonstrated on the chart on the following page.

### **Cambodia:**

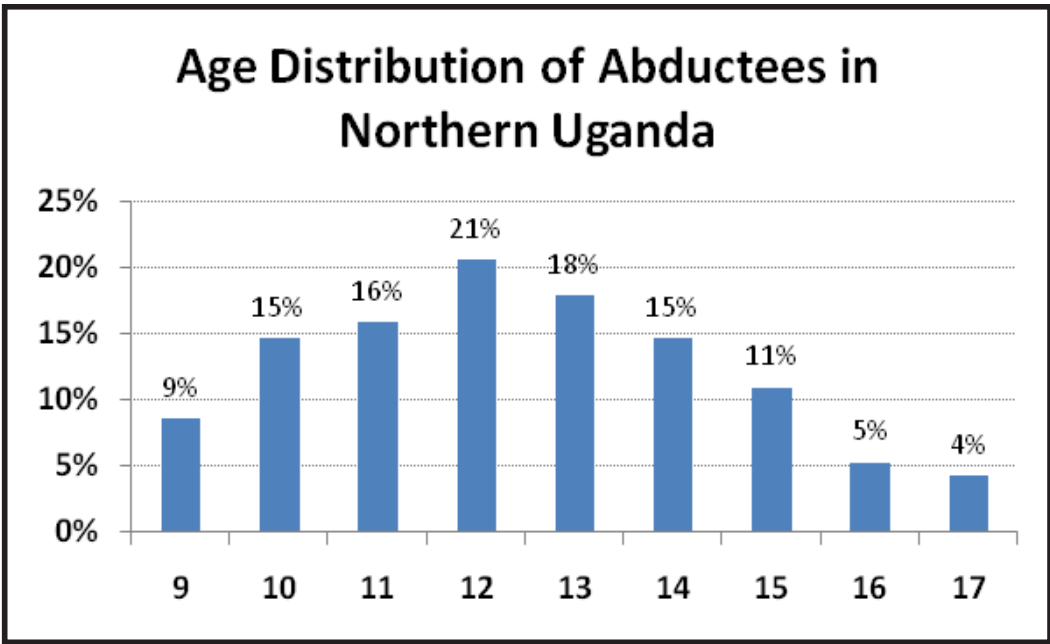
The use of children in the sex trade has increased tremendously over the past twenty years. This has been linked to the legacy of the Pol Pot Regime, the presence of the UNTAC peacekeeping force and the growth in sex tourism in the late 1990s. A 2007 report by ECPAT stated that “the average age of trafficked women and girls was 19.9 years with 44.7% below the age of 18 and 14.5% of girls 15 years of age or below.” Child rape is identified as a major concern, with connections being made to the social effects of the war, occupation of outside forces and extreme poverty.

### **Colombia:**

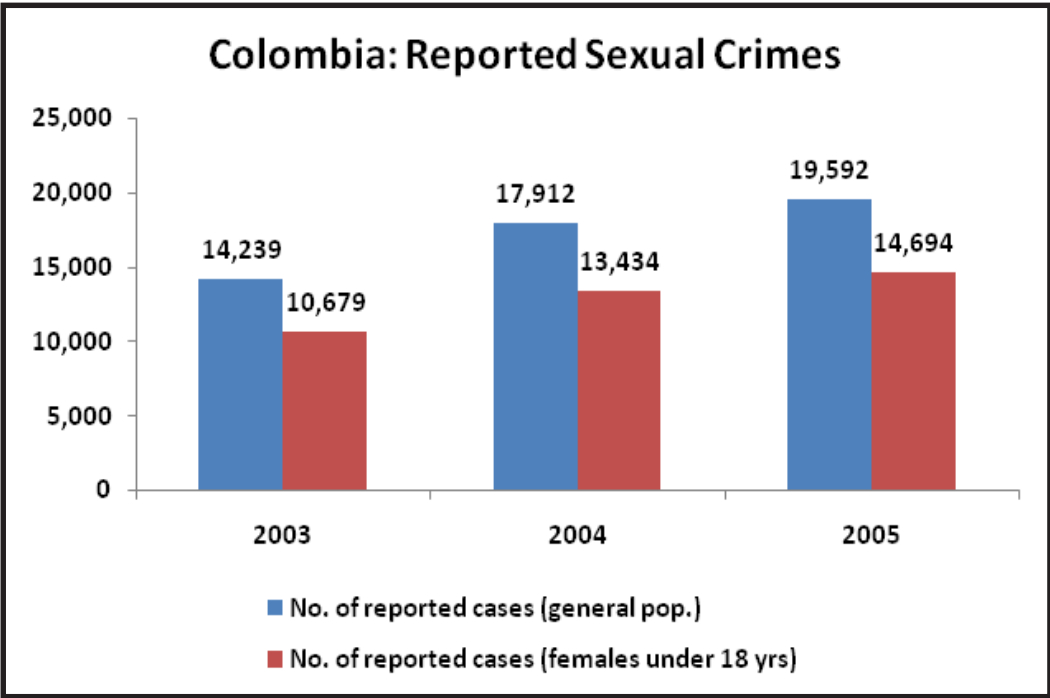
A 2009 IOM study on Colombia stated that 75.7% of reported sexual crimes were against females under the age of 18. The National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences has also documented the increase in these crimes over the past five years. This same study reported that 65% of sexual crimes were committed by family members or by people known by the victim. A chart providing an overview of this information is provided on the following page.

In a report submitted by 18 women’s organizations in Colombia to the U.N. High Commission to Human Rights in October 2008 it was noted that:

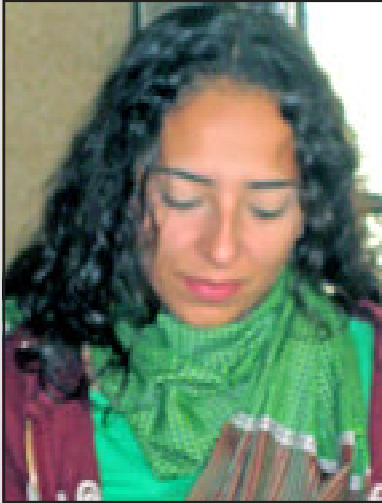
“According to official data (Prosecutor General’s Office and the National Institute for Forensic Medicine), State security forces rank highest among all the combatant groups that perpetrate sexual violence. According to the analyses by NGOs, the participation of the State security forces in acts of sexual violence almost tripled, in percentage points, in the last five-year period in comparison with the immediately preceding period.”



Source: World Vision Reception Centre Records, 2000 - 2006



Sources: National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences and IOM



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“With the guerilla you have no freedom. They want girls to be maids and they don’t worry about the harm that they do to you. The men want to rape the girls often. They hurt your mind, your body and your spirit.”

*Youth Informant*

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Why are young females being targeted? One obvious answer is the nature of today’s wars where there are few, if any, boundaries. A second point is the increased involvement of young people in these conflicts. They are used as combatants, messengers, spies and support personnel. For young people who have grown up inside armed conflict, they will weigh their options inside a very limited field of choices. As one youth noted, “the words willingly or non-willingly don’t really apply.” In Colombia, many girls join the FARC with the expectation that they will be treated equally, only to find that this is not the case.

The camps and resettled communities in both Northern Uganda and Colombia have seen high rates of sexual violence. Various reasons are given for this. This includes the attraction of a ‘fresh’ female and untouched body inside a world that is ugly and demoralized. In areas where there is a high levels of HIV infection (as there is in Northern Uganda) younger females are often preferred to prevent the possibility of infection. As well, there is the persistent belief that sex with a virgin will eliminate the disease.

### **3. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG PEOPLE INCREASES INSIDE THE CIVILIAN POPULATION BOTH DURING AND AFTER A WAR. THESE VIOLATIONS ARE OFTEN A MIRROR IMAGE OF ARMED GROUPS’ BEHAVIOUR, REFLECTING THEIR STRATEGIES AND UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER ROLES.**

Sexual violence is a destructive, complicated force whose consequences extend beyond a single attack. It has major implications for the victim, her family and community. It can also create the social conditions which foster new types of abuse inside civilian populations. This is not only at the personal level but also inside a society whose values and patterns of behavior have been contorted by war.

Perhaps because of this context, sexual violence can often be justified by perpetrators in terms that bear an unnerving connection to the mentality of armed groups. This cycle is of major concern in countries such as Northern Uganda where the peace process is being established after a long and bitter civil war.

Males are known to prey on girls who were with the LRA. During Northern Uganda’s war the levels of sexual violence became progressively higher inside the IDP camps. In CAP’s focus group discussions, male youth maintained that this was the way they were expected to behave, that if they didn’t act aggressively girls would not respect them; they would be laughed at for being weak.

In Colombia, male youth (not in armed groups) boasted about themselves as predators, saying that they had the right to take what they wanted, that girls had to understand and accept this:

“If the guy doesn’t receive something from a girl but he wants it, he is expecting it, he is going to use force against her, he is going to hurt her. That is just the way it is – everyone knows it.”

*Youth Informant*

In Northern Uganda, female returnees are often eager to find a male partner, saying that they feel inadequate and vulnerable without a man:

“Even after they have left and are safe, the big thing for them is to find a man. They have become too dependent and their mentality is such that they think they are useless without a man. They feel helpless, they hate men but they cannot do without them. It also affects their attitude to sex. They see it as a prower.”

*Counsellor*

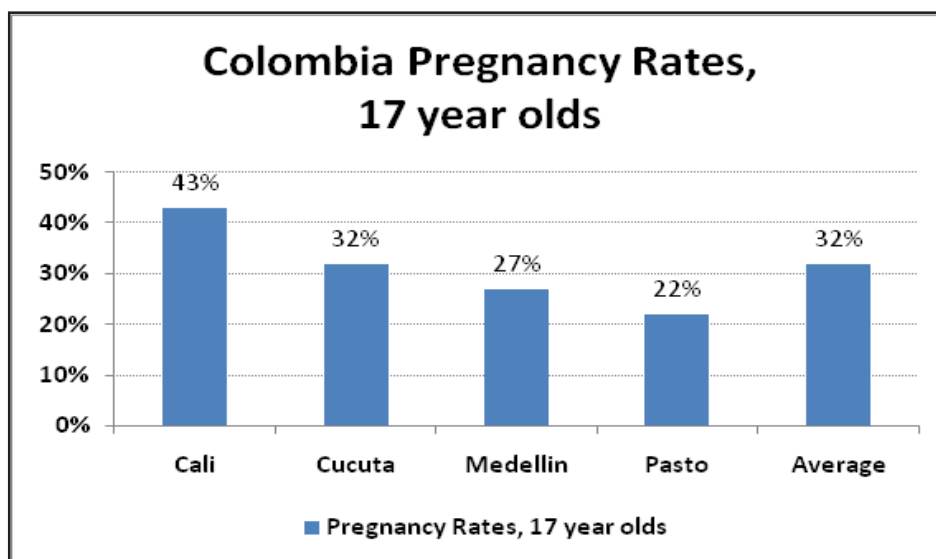
#### **4. THE MEANING AND IMPACT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG PEOPLE IS DETERMINED BY SOCIAL AND PERSONAL FACTORS WHICH STRUCTURE AN INDIVIDUAL’S CAPACITY TO COME TO TERMS WITH THIS VIOLENCE.**

### **The Nature of This Violence**

In CAP’s research, it was found that most violations occurred over several months or, in the case of Northern Uganda, years. This means that the habits of subjugation, violent disregard of a girl’s rights and the abuse of her body have become engrained into her consciousness. These are not easy patterns to erase. Some of the consequences of these experiences include:

- ◆ Northern Uganda counsellors found that female returnees suffered from a lack of identity and confidence to the point that it was very difficult for them to make decisions for themselves, to trust others or to participate in education programs.
- ◆ The teen pregnancy in both Colombia and Northern Uganda is extremely high. The chart on the next page provides statistics for Colombia based on a study by Defensoría Del Pueblo. For the four research sites, the average teen pregnancy rate is 32.5%. For comparison purposes, Canada’s teen pregnancy rate, as quoted by Statistics Canada, is 3.2%.

# REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ISSUES



Source: Defensoría Del Pueblo, June 2008

ICBF Colombia reports a lower national teen pregnancy rate of 19%. Social workers in both Colombia and Northern Uganda expressed their frustration about reaching the adolescent population on matters relating to birth control and family planning.

“We tried to give them information about family planning, but they didn’t like it at all. For them, somehow they don’t believe in it. They believe that when you are with a man you have to give birth.

And remember in the bush, when you give birth it means that you have reduced your problems – you have become a mother and you will be appreciated more by a man that has so much control over you. So I think that mentality is still there.”

*Florence Lakko, Northern Uganda*

Both Colombia and Northern Uganda have extremely high rates of STDs and HIV infection inside internally displaced populations. Northern Uganda’s rate of HIV infection is 12 % (Gulu District Report, 2009) as compared to the national average of 6.5%.

The incidence of HIV infection amongst the male or female returnee population in Northern Uganda was not high, with the exception of those girls who had the very bad luck to be given to a certain commander who was known to have HIV. However, many girls coming back from the bush had problems with other related problems:

“Some of them come back with HIV, but that is not that common. What is more common are other types of STDs. We try to teach them about their bodies, to help with this connection. After that you can find so many things. A lot of them complain about itching, itching all over their bodies, particularly in their private parts.”

*Florence Lakko, Northern Uganda*



## **The Impact on Gender Roles**

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Males and females growing up inside war situations receive contradictory messages on what it means to be a good man or woman. For both, survival usually entails major compromises, ones opposed to traditional gender roles. For males this involves an emphasis on aggressive behaviour and the elimination of their protective responsibilities. For girls, the requirements are more extreme as forms of sexual violence or sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage are expected.

These extreme aberrations in social mores has major consequences for both sexes, but particularly for girls. For males there is a tendency to contain and explain inappropriate actions as the demands of war. For young females, this excuse is insufficient. Whether willing or not, she has stepped outside her society's definition of what it means to be a proper female. This can relegate her to an outcast status inside her own culture. For an adolescent girl who is defining both her gender identity and social position in her community, this has major consequences:



"In Cambodia, we have the custom that a male is made of pure gold. No matter the fire, you can still not melt the pure gold. Just like gold, a male stays as he is, regardless of what he does or happens to him.

But a girl is made of white cloth. If there is a black mark, it cannot be washed, even if you try, you can never really wash it off, so for ever she has that. Maybe she was a victim of the violence, but still that mark is there on her forever."

## **Social Dynamics & Sexual Violence**

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The social consequences of sexual violence are extremely complex. These repercussions include both the community's response to a victim as well as her/his understanding and relationships with others. Many victims are ostracized by family, friends and neighbours.

Girls who have been raped or defiled can be subjected to their family's solution of 'the problem' in ways that further their victimization. Where boys may be allowed some latitude in their behaviour, girls are not. If their recovery includes actions that community members find socially unacceptable (impatience, need for control, outbursts of anger) it can increase their isolation.

And finally, there is the difficulty of the "victim" label itself. Both girls and their community can become locked inside a history which allow little opportunity to throw off this definition of who they are and how they relate to others.

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**“ What disturbs them the most is that they have had no control over their lives. So they want to get that back. It can make them very stubborn.**

**You see it a lot. They refuse to eat, they refuse to go to group counselling, they won't talk in the sessions. For many of the counsellors this was hard. They would try to speak with them, they would be kind and friendly and the girls would turn their head away, refusing to speak, they would be very impatient, they just didn't want to cooperate.**

**They need to show that they are the ones making the decisions. This is very important to them.**

***Florence Lakko, Former  
Matron of WV Reception  
Centre and Counsellor  
for Girls***

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## Some of the issues identified in the focus group discussions:

- ◆ The world is unkind to rape victims. Girls will often shun those who are known to have been raped, even in groups where it is acknowledged that they have all experienced sexual violence.
- ◆ Social isolation is a major factor. Girls have both real and imagined experiences of being excluded by others. For example, in workshops with female returnees in Northern Uganda, they repeatedly stated, “We know what they think of us, we know they hate us.” They are sure that others are looking down on them and can react very angrily to the smallest of slights. This pattern was also noted in discussions with girls in Colombia.
- ◆ In both Colombia and Northern Uganda, families of rape victims will frequently opt for a “private” solution. This can involve marriage to the rapist, particularly if he is known to the family. The explanation is that this restores the family’s honour, saves the girl from stigmatisation and the prosecution of the perpetrator. It sometimes includes a payment to the bride’s family, seen as a compensation for the diminished prospects of a dowry. Everyone wins, except the girl who is expected to live with her attacker. Several girls who were interviewed said that they had refused, much to the anger of their families.
- ◆ Stigmatization is a major concern for all victims of sexual violence. In Cambodia, once a girl has entered the sex trade she can assume that her fate is sealed. Shelter workers find that these girls will frequently resist attempts to “rescue” them from their situations.

## Issues Related to Age and Life Experience

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For many victims of sexual violence, this is their first sexual experience; they have nothing else to compare it with. This has major implications for how they see themselves and their sexuality. These problems are compounded by the fact that young victims of sexual violence are just that – very young. They do not have resources that might be available to adult women.

“They had their first sex experience when they were small and they had no control over it, they don't value their body anymore, they don't see it the same way as those who have had a more normal introduction to sex. And it is made worse by how the LRA see females. The basic idea is that women are evil.”



#### **CAMBODIA:**

“90% of girls are volunteer sex workers – they do it, they feel that they have no other options.

So technically they are not “trafficked” it is a career that they have chosen, because of the circumstances of their lives.”

*ECPAT  
Coordinator*

## **5. WAR UNDERMINES FAMILY STRUCTURES AND RELATIONSHIPS. THIS GREATLY INCREASES YOUNG PEOPLE’S VULNERABILITY TO SEXUAL VIOLATIONS.**

Family relationships are a major casualty in wars. In CAP’s research, young people described fighting, constant tension over money, drunkenness, parents’ impatience with their needs and a general lack of connection inside their families.

In 2006 Uganda’s Law Reform Commission reported that the rate of domestic violence in Northern Uganda was 78%, over twice the national rate of approximately 30%. According to the Inter American Commission on Human Rights, 43 out of every 100 Colombian women are victims of violence.

In CAP Uganda’s focus group discussions, parents expressed a bewildered sadness about their capacity to protect or control their children. They criticized their offspring’s belligerence and disrespect for elders. Young people countered with descriptions of men staggering around the camps, drunk by noontime.

In Cambodia, young people speak of their ‘refrigerator parents’, saying that their parents rarely show affection and are often depressed or angry. This country is afflicted by high rates of domestic violence, including physical punishment against children. This is often connected to both the actions of the Pol Pot Regime with its harsh treatment of young people as well as traditional parenting practices.

The consequences of these family breakdowns are enormous for young people. Despite social service agencies’ attempt to fill the gap, it is impossible to replace the safety that a family can provide or its sense of identity and belonging that promotes self-protection.

#### **Colombia:**

“They are very poor and there is so much violence in the family. Many times they don’t even have a chair to sit on. So they don’t feel like staying at home.

They go out to the street to find friends. A lot of girls are escaping from horrible home situations, especially with their fathers...But the street is dangerous. Prostitution is common. The police treat them badly, very badly.”

#### **Northern Uganda:**

“The huts are small and there is no privacy. So sometimes the fathers will kick them out and tell them to find their own place to sleep that night. For girls this can be dangerous – there are men hanging around, some drunk, maybe looking for a female.”



## 6. THE DOCUMENTATION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST YOUNG PEOPLE REQUIRES DIFFERENT APPROACHES AND METHODS THAN THOSE USED WITH ADULT VICTIMS.

In CAP's focus group discussions it was clear that victims are eager for their voices to be heard, their experiences acknowledged. It was equally apparent that current documentation mechanisms need to be adjusted to respond to young victims' needs, their social realities and security problems.

Young people do not have the world experience to understand criminal proceedings and their requirements. A girl who was in the bush with the LRA for many years cannot separate one rape from other. Neither do they have the language to define these violations inside a legal framework.

Local judicial systems present logistical problems for a girl wishing to lodge a complaint. For example, in Cambodia, girls must be accompanied by an adult – a person under 18 years cannot file a complaint independently. Adults must pay a fee to make a charge and police often expect an additional payment. NGOs in Cambodia are willing to pay these fees but not all individuals are aware that the service exists.

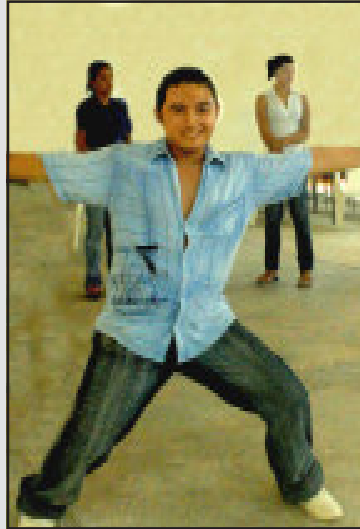
Social workers expressed concern about the type of information that is required by police, journalists and researchers. They readily agreed that perpetrators should never be immune to prosecution and that solid information and statistics were the basis for any indictment or advocacy campaign. However, the nature of conflict situations, with high numbers of violations and ongoing security problems, mean that the current framework, derived from criminal courts, can cause problems. The idea of "standing up and being counted" is not necessarily a realistic requirement, particularly for a 14 year old.

A major issue for young people is the ownership of their experiences. Young people noted that there is often an assumption that they should talk to others about a violation, that it will make them feel better. But this can take away their control as others can have a tendency to define the experience for them. For example, girls who were with the LRA resent the label "sexual slave" as they feel this undermines their dignity.

A second difficulty is the interview process itself. Many girls are reluctant to speak about these experiences but feel that they must respond to the questions of outsiders, particularly foreigners. The questions used can define or structure the experience in ways that are inappropriate. For example, some Colombian girls who were with the FARC can bristle at being told that they were victims – they do not understand their experience in this way and resent others assigning this label.

## **7. SEXUAL VIOLENCE HAS A MAJOR IMPACT ON GENDER RELATIONS FOR VICTIMS, PERPETRATORS AND YOUTH GROWING UP INSIDE WAR SITUATIONS.**

A Colombian male youth stated: “This violence has marked our bodies and affected how we see and act with each other.” Male aggression and entitlement is readily apparent, particularly in Colombia and Northern Uganda. Females who have been violated often have very strong reactions to males, hating the power that they feel they have over them.



As noted in an earlier section, there is a terrible tendency for war's violence to be repeated inside domestic situations. This often translates into sexual harassment and violence. But there is a counter force, one that rejects this pessimism and negativity.

In the focus group discussions, both males and females insisted that something different was possible and that they, as youth who had a deep understanding of what war can do to people, could actively work for change. They understood that this needed to begin with the construction of equitable relationships between males and females as the foundation on which war-based violence can be challenged.

They also emphasized that sexual violence should be understood as a gender issue and that earlier assumptions that this is primarily a woman's concern must change. While males were reluctant to accept responsibility for others' actions, they readily admitted that the current status of male privilege sets the foundation for gender based violence and this must be challenged..

## **8. CHILDREN BORN OF WAR AND THEIR YOUNG MOTHERS HAVE MAJOR OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME BASED ON THEIR SOCIAL POSITIONS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES.**

In Northern Uganda, hundreds of children were born while their mothers were held in captivity by the Lords Resistance Army. According to World Vision Reception Centre's records, most children were 1 – 3 years old when their mothers escaped, though some were as old as 7 or 8.

It is difficult to predict exactly how their time in the bush has, if at all, marked these children. Counsellors from the World Vision Reception Centre recalled that at first many of the younger children will march around, imitating soldiers' actions. However, these habits diminish as they adjust to a new type of life.

What is clear, however, is the complexities of their integration into Northern Ugandan community life. The social situation for children born in captivity is extremely ambiguous. The relationship between mothers and their children is complicated – strong emotional bonds frustrated by the difficulties for both:



“As girls coming back from the bush we often hear our neighbours whispering about us. They keep whispering, “See that girl who was with the rebels. She is a killer. She killed people and see there she also has a LRA baby, LRA children too.”

“It is different for boys and girls when they are coming back. The boys come back without children. But us, we all have children from our time with the rebels. They are our children, you cannot leave this child, she is yours.

But if you want to make a new life, start a new life with a man, you will always suffer because of this child. And the child will suffer too, because of you, because of your past in the bush.

“It is harder for girls. And it is hard. Because people will say things to you and that thing will live with you. It stands in your heart. And when you are suffering, when are depressed, you will always think about those things. A boy just forgets but a girl is not made that way. And people do not let a girl forget. It is impossible for a girl to brush that thing off.”

*Focus group, girl returnees,  
Northern Uganda*

In workshops with children who were born in captivity they confided their worries about their mothers who are often depressed and quiet. They spoke of difficulties with play-mates and feelings of rejection.

As one young boy said, “I have only one problem – everyone hates me.” Others spoke of their worries that their mothers would find new boyfriends who would reject them, a common problem.

Charles Watmon, who has worked with girls both at the WV Reception Centre and in the community, explained:

“This is a very big problem - how a child born in captivity can be accepted in the family. It will take time. The parents of the girl will pretend that they are trying to accept the child, but internally they are not happy, inside they are not happy.



They had different dreams for their daughter, that she would finish school. But now she comes back with a fatherless child, they may either know or not know who that man is. There was no program for that child – they will imagine what that child will do in the future, who will take care of it.

Now, when it is small, they can be a little different but that thought is still in their heads. And if the child makes a mistake – and it is normal for them to do that – then they can quickly say, “Oh, that is what your father used to do, you are the child of a rebel.” And they will call him by that name, and the child feels very bad.”

While the specifics are unique and extreme in Northern Uganda, there are many similarities with other conflict countries, particularly those which have a high level of youth involvement. This has created considerable difficulties for young mothers struggling to be parents, their families who are unsure how to provide assistance, and most of all, these children who have little status or social position inside their communities.

#### **9. REINTEGRATION CENTRES PROVIDE MUCH NEEDED EMERGENCY LEVEL CARE BUT ARE NOT WELL EQUIPPED TO ASSIST WITH LONG TERM RECOVERY.**

In all three research countries transition and shelter centres were provided for girls who had escaped abusive situations (child soldiers, sex trade workers and child rape victims). These programs are definitely important – they provide safety, physical comfort and much needed emotional support. For girls in the Phnom Penh shelter the workers clearly filled a parental role. Female returnees continue to visit the WV Reception Centre to recall memories of when they first came back from the bush.

These centres operate under a considerable amount of pressure and conflicting demands. On the one hand, there are the obvious needs of girls for medical attention, food and overall rehabilitation of their bodies, minds and hearts. On the other, there are the parents and family members who are so eager to see their daughters, to confirm that they are well.

A DDR program or shelter is an oasis or way-station between the horrors that a young female has experienced and the adjustments she will need to make to a new reality. Because the hard fact is that for most girls there is no returning to what they once had, no magical turning back of the clock.

In Colombia, indigenous communities usually suggest that girls

escaping the FARC should be placed in other centres for their security and the complications of their different status. Young community sex trade workers in Cambodia can often be resold by their families or find that socially they no longer fit in. Female returnees in Northern Uganda typically have difficult transitions back into their families.

In discussions with shelter workers and youth the following issues were identified:



- ◆ Young people in these centres are in a state of crisis. They have limited capacity to make informed decisions about the next steps in their lives. However, they are often expected to do so.
- ◆ In many cases training programs are inadequate. They also expect young people to have a level of confidence and independence to succeed on their own after the training is completed. This is just not realistic.
- ◆ Shelters and DDR programs mostly focus on skills training for income generation. However important this is, these girls often lack other critical life skills which they need in order to use their training effectively.
- ◆ Girls living inside abusive situations rely on friendships to help them survive. They are incredibly important. However, reintegration programs often work on an individual level in counseling and income generating training. This misses a valuable resource to strengthen young people's resiliency and capacity for recovery.



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“ One part tht isn’t good about the international community is that everything has to come from them. The perspective on our country is theirs.

This means that when you are looking for funding you cannot create your program with your ideas and sense of create a program that follows their ideas, their priorities and their ways of understanding the problem and how to deal with it.”

*Youth from Cambodia*

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## 10. HOWEVER NEEDED AND REQUESTED, INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE CAN CREATE NEW ISSUES AND PROBLEMS.

“You have to be a victim, that is what they want, that is how you can get the assistance.”

*Female returnee, N. Uganda*

This statement may seem harsh, but it reflects a popular assumption, particularly in Northern Uganda and Cambodia. They complain that they are kept inside the “victim” label by donors and programmers. As much as young people want international funding and advocacy support, they chafe under the feeling that their world is being circumscribed by others.

In conflict situations, where local populations are greatly demoralized, the power to find and implement a solution can be handed over to international agencies. These organizations have financial assistance and expert advice to offer. The result can be helpful with positive outcomes. But the bigger difficulty with such dependency is the assumptions that develop in terms of local skills, power and capabilities. The outside actors get to define the problem, the other to live its reality.

The other issue, and just as critical, is the tendency to freeze a situation in time (usually at its crisis point), and to maintain a “reality” that no longer exists. Having established a habit and relationship with outside funders, local groups will continue to speak in those terms. On an individual level, girls will understand that they need to remain “victims” in order to receive support. In Northern Uganda, female returnees continue to be asked to provide stories of their time in the bush, despite the fact that many have been home for six years or more.

These dynamics are particularly critical in the early post-conflict stage, as can be currently seen in Northern Uganda. After 21 years, this war is ending. People are worried that the international humanitarian community, with its substantial funding, systems and services will leave. In Cambodia, social workers will confess that the statistics on the sex trade are decreasing. While pleased about this news, they also worry that it will cause a decrease in funding needed to maintain progress and sustain these positive outcomes.

These are complex issues which require flexibility, trust and honesty on all sides.



## LIFE IS A DANCE

The tree represents the many events that have marked my life. I have seen and felt hard things, but I've also been able to put down roots. The center of my drawing is a spiral and represents my family. I've had much support from them. My family brought me up by giving me the possibility to make decisions. The branches represent persons, other people, who have been there.

Ever since I was little I feel that I've been involved in processes. I've never looked at females as victims and males as victimizers. I have been able to participate in horizontal relationships between men and women: I don't trust vertical relationships, I reject authoritarianism. I believe that my mother is proud of me. She loves me a lot, that's why there are also strong colors.

Life is worth it for itself. This is why I put the tree. I don't believe in categories: we are all human beings. Just as I, as a male, suffer, so do females suffer. I relate more to women than to men.

**We all have fears.** An x appears because many things have been denied me in life. There has been blood, a lot of people have been killed. But red is not only blood, it is also passion.

My drawing has birds flying; I don't like to catch them – they are my dreams, some that I have achieved. You see people dancing because life is a dance.

Male participant,  
Art workshop in Colombia

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation #1:** Programs to prevent sexual violence should begin with a contextual analysis of the types of violations operating inside a given situation and the populations most affected by this violence. Young people should be actively involved in these assessments, both males and females. Prevention measures should be based on this information.

While general advocacy projects to “Stop Sexual Violence” are useful as a backdrop they are unlikely to yield significant results unless they relate directly to the social/military dynamics operating inside a particular conflict. Involvement of young people is critical and should be complemented by consultations with relevant adults such as teachers, social workers, parents and extended family members.

Public meetings to confirm findings and identify collective protection measures are an important next step. These strategies are best conceived as partnerships where youth, adults, community elders and organizations all have a role. International organizations can provide information on methods that have proven to be effective in other situations.

All threats cannot, of course, be eliminated. However, this approach increases active resistance and reduces feelings of powerlessness. It also affirms the roles of parents as caregivers and protectors of their children.

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**Recommendation #2:** Special programs must be created to respond to the specific needs of young people who have suffered from sexual violence. This should include protocols that attend to the physical, emotional and social needs of victims and be linked to the types of violations they have experienced.

These programs should have a sequential approach in order to respond appropriately to the changing needs and capacities of a young person recovering from a violation.

Programs for young victims must take into account their life position, social status and maturity as well as the type of sexual violence. The needs of a girl who has been a child soldier and systematically violated for several months or years are different than those of a girl who has experienced a single attack.

## **Elements for these programs should include:**

### **◆ Staged recovery programs**

Recovery programs should include immediate (emergency), short term and long term components which recognize and respond to the different needs of young victims on their path to recovery and maturation.

### **◆ Participation**

An overall approach of informed consent and active partnerships with youth should structure the planning of recovery programs for young people. This should include the definition of the nature, extent and impact of violations, the assessment of skills, interests and capacities and the development of a plan to encourage victims' abilities to assert control over the future direction of their lives. While girls should not be expected to make long term plans, short, realistic goal setting will help establish a pattern of responsibility and build self confidence.

### **◆ Care of the body & reproductive health**

It should be assumed that a young victim has limited understanding of reproductive health issues and has little awareness of how to properly care for her body. Particularly in the case of former child soldiers who may have experienced physical assaults over several months or years, it is important to do a thorough assessment of any real, potential or perceived damage.

While education on reproductive health and birth control information are critical, this training must be integrated inside an overall program that builds self reliance and control of her body. It is important to remember that simply providing information is probably a waste of time and effort as victims of continual assaults have lost a sense of how to care for themselves.

### **◆ Practical skill training**

As part of a victim's first assessment, it is important to identify the practical skills she requires to survive the initial phase of her recovery or, in the case of former child soldiers, reintegration. This may include parenting skills.

Girls who have been in the bush for many years may have lost numeracy and literacy skills, even if they were attending school at the time of abduction. Others may need help with basic social skills. This training will help girls to function in their new roles; reduce social isolation; build their self confidence and provide a platform for future assistance.

### **◆ Affirmation of human rights; exploration of gender identities**

These topics should be integrated into all aspects of recovery programs, both in formal education programs and as the basis for all counselling and health interventions. This approach should be framed inside local cultural traditions.

◆ **Peer friendships and the participation of older women**

Counselling programs often adopt an individualistic approach, despite the fact that peer friendships are a major aspect of young people's lives and an important survival tactic. Recovery programs should reinforce these connections through training and logistical assistance as a way of fostering young people's resiliency and self reliance. Discussions and basic skill training should involve older women as they can provide useful guidance and a sense of protection.

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**Recommendation #3:** **In addition to their involvement in practical measures to assess and prevent sexual violence, young people can play an important role in public education work to advocate against sexual violence and to create the social conditions which reject these violations.**

Young people listen to their peers. The involvement of youth in public education work is a powerful tool to ensure the success of any campaign. But this must be more than simple window dressing and using young people to promote messages created by adults.

Each generation has a different understanding of sexuality and young people, particularly males, need to be directly involved in the defining of these roles and the identification of the most useful ways to challenge gender stereotypes. This is particularly important in conflict situations as it provides young people the opportunity to redefine their world and relationships in more positive ways.

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**Recommendation #4:** **UN Security Council Resolution 1612 and the recently adopted UN SC 1882 must be supported to realize their full potential as measures to uphold the rights of children living in conflict situations.**

UN SC 1612 and the recently adopted UN SC 1882 are unique resolutions that provide the opportunity for the Security Council, governments, UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations to work in partnerships to provide effective protection for young people in conflict situations. The inclusion of sexual violence as a critical monitoring agent is an important and much applauded step.

The key approach of 1612/1882 is as a deterrent where grave violators are named and potentially sanctioned. This requires wide awareness of the resolution to encourage reporting and to ensure that any "naming" done by the Security Council committee will carry strong weight. Just as important is the need for young people to know about these resolutions and the commitment to children's rights that they represent.

All of this requires the active participation of many groups, from youth community organizations to UN agencies. It offers a special opportunity to forge new partnerships in ways where meaningful connections are made between the international world and local communities, thus breaking down the isolation that is so common in conflict situations.

Canada is uniquely placed to provide leadership in this work. As a country known for its commitment to human rights, protection of children, participatory processes and the enactment of UN SC 1612/1882 it has both the trust and the credentials to take a lead role in this work. The inclusion of sexual violence as a key component of UN SC 1612/1882 also links to Canada's determination to prevent the current high rates of sexual violence from continuing.

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**Recommendation #5:** **The documentation of sexual violence against young people requires new methods and approaches. These should be oriented to their needs for recognition and security and tailored to their capacities for expression.**

Current documentation protocols use a quasi-criminal approach, one tailored to domestic situations rather than today's civil conflicts. However inappropriate these methods may be in working with adults, they pose even greater problems for children, particularly in conflict zones where they are targets and resources for many armed groups.

This does not mean that these violations should be ignored or go unreported - far from it. Instead, new protocols should be created, ones that realistically address the nature of today's wars, the ways young people are used and the changes in the strategies of war where random attacks are being replaced by systematic employment of sexual violence as a weapon of war. A single person testifying to an assault is an inadequate expression of these dynamics.

Equally important is the need to revise the current procedures for giving evidence. Old Q/A formats are more suited to adults than children and youth. New protocols should be developed which allow various methods of expression. Consideration should be given to the adoption of collective rather than individual claims, particularly in situations of mass rape or where youth are used as combatants. Young people should assist in the development of new vocabularies to define and describe their experiences.

Finally, the rules and language of the International Criminal Court should be reviewed to ensure that legal terms include those under the age of 18. For example, the sections on sexual war crimes often use the words "women" which technically may be limited to a person of adult age (i.e. over 18 years).

**Recommendation #6:** Support for families and the rejuvenation of the family structure should be an important cornerstone in any strategy to reduce sexual violence against children and youth.

CAPs' research has confirmed the fundamental importance of the family and parents in young people's lives. In war situations this is often their only security and source of belonging. However, the research has also demonstrated that families are collapsing under the pressure of long and brutal civil wars and this, in turn, is creating vulnerabilities for children. Rather than trying to replace dysfunctional families with outside services, it would be more useful to find ways to restore the family's strength.

Few parents living in a war zone can live up to the ideals of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* or other protocols for the proper care and protection of their sons and daughters. A rigorous "reality check" is required: What sort of parenting skills are most required to provide young people baseline guidance and effective protection to function inside unfamiliar and dangerous situations? What formal and informal training and support mechanisms would best strengthen parents' capacities to meet these needs?

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**Recommendation #7:** Reintegration programs should give a high priority to education on sexual identities, gender roles and the prevention of sexual violence.

CAP's research has demonstrated the carry-over of military actions and mentalities into civilian life. This finding is also confirmed in countries such as Burundi and Liberia which have reported an increase in rape and sexual assaults during post-conflict times.

This has particular consequences for male youth combatants. Their formative years have been spent in a world that endorses the use of force, male entitlement and distorted notion of gender relations. In reintegration programs, it is important to consciously challenge these views. Young people, particularly males committed to human rights work, are well positioned to take on this task.

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**Recommendation #8:** **Training of police, peacekeepers and military personnel on child rights and support for sexual assault victims is a basic requirement.**

This is an essential step to help reduce, if not completely eliminate, the potential for girls to be mistreated by the people who have the responsibility to protect them. This training should include a basic orientation on children's rights, appropriate behaviour in dealing with girls and the types of support that peacekeepers can provide to help ensure more effective protection. This last point should be done in conjunction with local youth who can act as a guide on dangerous situations.

UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882, with their mandate to prevent, monitor and report on violations against children, including sexual violence, is an excellent reference point for this work.

There are often stories and rumours about the improper activities of peacekeepers, the police and military personnel. In CAP's research this was revealed, but it was also emphasized that appropriate and practical training significantly reduces these violations.