

Women as weapons of war

This statement should be read in conjunction with FIGO and Mukwege Foundation's ["The Red Line Initiative: a joint call to draw a red line to end conflict-related sexual violence"](#).

FIGO acknowledges that rape is an illegitimate and condemnable war tactic and calls for the global inclusion of rape as a war crime. Since time immemorial, women have been subjugated to various forms of violence, which have been used as weapons in confrontations and war to demoralise and depress women, men and communities.

Survivors suffer from PTSD, infectious diseases such as HIV, and social and financial issues. The children born out of these incidents suffer from ill health, stress, lack of attention and education, behavioural and emotional disturbances, and above all stigma that will last a lifetime. In conflict situations, the crime of rape is used as a weapon to oppress the population and terrorise them. Examples of the use of women as weapons of war have been seen in Iraq, Bosnia, Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The situation in the DRC is particularly alarming and exemplifies the intensity of the problem in its acute form. Since 2015, eastern DRC has been the site of an ongoing military conflict – women there face a war within a war. According to one estimate, 40 women are raped every day. There are 200,000 women who have survived rape living in DRC.

FIGO position

FIGO recognises that rape of women is widespread as a weapon for terrorising communities – especially in war torn areas and among displaced populations. Rape leaves behind psychological and physical trauma, alongside inflicting socioeconomic cost on survivors and families. It has been used as a weapon not only to humiliate women and families and to dominate and destroy communities, but also to exterminate populations and drive people from their homes.

FIGO acknowledges that rape is an illegitimate and condemnable war tactic and a war crime that threatens international peace and security.

FIGO condemns sexual violence and rape of girls and women which is systematic in its execution.

FIGO envisions itself a part of the solution for survivors, by communicating with national societies and through them with health care professionals, to take the message forward.

FIGO joins hands with the Red Line Initiative to condemn rape during war and is determined to raise awareness among health care professionals of this important issue and to raise its voice for criminal prosecution of offenders.

FIGO calls for the global classification of rape as a war crime. The United Nations Human Rights Commission passed a resolution identifying rape as a war crime in 1993: an act that allows for crimes of rape and sexual violence to be prosecuted as war crimes and crimes against humanity, and allowing for survivors to seek reparations.

FIGO recommendations

FIGO recommends that member societies and partners:

- work towards universal recognition of rape as a war crime
- support the Red Line Initiative and stand by all actions to protect women affected by rape
- create awareness about the devastating effects of rape and sexual violence, which is exacerbated in the context of conflict and displacement
- support individual OBGYNs to show sensitivity and understand the needs of affected women
- institute measures to limit the plight of survivors by providing medical treatment health care counselling psychological support and community mobilisation.

FIGO commitments

FIGO commits to:

- amplify the stories of survivors and condemn the issue of rape of women as weapon of war
- support the provision of health care counselling to survivors
- seek support and cooperation of national member societies and partners in support of the health and wellbeing of young women and girls
- provide technical support to national societies interested in reviewing policies and guidelines, as well as opportunities for consultation on emerging issues
- ensure that rights, medical ethics, respect, confidentiality, and equity are part of all discussions on services to this vulnerable group.

References and further reading

www.figo.org/resources/figo-statements/red-line-initiative-end-conflict-related-sexual-violence

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World Health Organization. 2000. *Reproductive Health During Conflict and Displacement: a Guide for Programme Managers*.

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Bastick, M., Grimm, K., & Kunz, R. (2007). *Sexual Violence in armed Conflict: Global Overview and Implications for the Security Sector*. Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.

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About FIGO

FIGO is a professional membership organisation that brings together more than 130 obstetrical and gynaecological associations from all over the world. FIGO's vision is that women of the world achieve the highest possible standards of physical, mental, reproductive and sexual health and wellbeing throughout their lives. Our work to achieve this vision is built on four pillars: education, research implementation, advocacy and capacity building.

FIGO leads on global programme activities, with a particular focus on sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia. We advocate on a global stage, especially in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) pertaining to reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and wellbeing, and non-communicable diseases (SDG3). We also work to raise the status of women and enable their active participation in achieving their reproductive and sexual rights, including through addressing female-genital mutilation (FGM) and gender-based violence (SDG5).

We also provide education and training for our Member Societies and build capacities of those in low-resource countries through strengthening leadership, translating and disseminating good practice and promoting policy dialogues.

FIGO is in official relations with the World Health Organization and a consultative status with the United Nations.

About the language we use

Within our documents, we often use the terms 'woman', 'girl' and 'women and girls'. We recognise that not all people who require access to gynaecological and obstetric services identify as a woman or girl. All individuals, regardless of gender identity, must be provided with access to appropriate, inclusive and sensitive services and care.

We also use the term 'family'. When we do, we are referring to a recognised group (perhaps joined by blood, marriage, partnership, cohabitation or adoption) that forms an emotional connection and serves as a unit of society.

FIGO acknowledges that some of the language we use is not naturally inclusive. We are undertaking a thorough review of the words and phrases we use to describe people, health, wellbeing and rights, to demonstrate our commitment to developing and delivering inclusive policies, programmes and services.

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Referencing this statement

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