

BACKGROUND GUIDE



UNITED NATIONS WOMEN

Agenda: Deliberating upon the protection of women rights in conflict zones.



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear Delegates,

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Women committee at this year's conference. We are honoured to serve as your Executive Board for an agenda that is not only timely but also critical to the global human rights discourse—**“Deliberating upon the Protection of Women's Rights in Conflict Zones.”**

In regions plagued by conflict, women often endure the most harrowing consequences—ranging from sexual violence and forced displacement to the loss of access to education, healthcare, and legal protection. Yet, they are also the backbone of resilience—leading households, negotiating peace, and rebuilding communities.

This committee offers a platform to explore the duality of women as both victims and agents of change in conflict zones. Through your research, debate, and diplomacy, we hope to see nuanced solutions that don't just acknowledge the issues, but push for **institutional accountability, inclusive peace processes, and sustainable frameworks for protection and empowerment.**

We urge you to step into this room with empathy, clarity, and purpose. Go beyond surface-level statistics—ask the difficult questions, consider the lived experiences, and most importantly, propose actions that are *implementable, intersectional, and impactful.*

We look forward to witnessing thoughtful deliberations, meaningful collaboration, and the kind of leadership that reflects the very mission of UN Women—**equality, dignity, and justice for all.**

Warm regards,

Arnav Dev, Chairperson

Avni Agrawal, Vice Chairperson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Committee Overview	4
Introduction to the Agenda	6
Background of the Agenda	7
Past UN Resolutions and Frameworks	10
Suggestion for Action	14
Statistics and Data	15
Timeline for Key Events	17
Questions to Consider	18
Further Resources	19



COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

History:

UN Women is the [United Nations](#) entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities:

- Women [lead, participate in and benefit equally](#) from governance systems
- Women have [income security, decent work and economic autonomy](#)
- All women and girls live a life free [from all forms of violence](#)
- Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in [building sustainable peace and resilience](#), and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and [humanitarian action](#)

UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality, and in all deliberations and agreements linked to the 2030 Agenda. The entity works to position gender equality as fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals, and a more inclusive world.

Structure:

UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, has a two-tiered governance structure. The General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the Executive Board oversee its operational activities and provide operational policy guidance. The General Assembly, ECOSOC, and the Commission on the Status of Women oversee its normative support functions and provide normative policy guidance. According to UN General Assembly [resolution 64/289](#), which established UN

Women, the organization is governed by a multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure as follows:

“(a) ... the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) shall constitute the multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure for the normative support functions and shall provide normative policy guidance to the Entity;

“(b) ... the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the [Executive Board](#) of the Entity shall constitute the multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure for the operational activities and shall provide operational policy guidance to the Entity.”

Mandate:

UN Women (UNW) is a UN initiative dedicated solely to working towards ameliorating gender equality and policies that uphold the rights of and empower women. It successfully stands as a means to mediate and hasten issues that pertain to women's rights. It was established to accelerate and speed up the progress in meeting their needs worldwide. Within the UN System, UNW is mandated to lead, promote and coordinate efforts to ensure the complete realization of women's potential. UNW urges its member states to each be the standard of equality between the genders that other nations should aspire to reach. The organization works with governments and various civil societies to ultimately create laws, policies, programs, and services that will act as the framework for women to beat the oppression they face, and the efforts of the UNW to make gender equality mandated in policy are bolstered. The UNW makes a direct log of the role of women and women's status in UN proceedings and upholds accountability for their commitments. The UNW, much like other UN-affiliated organizations, has an ultimate vision of fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. Under Goals 5 and 10, the organization wishes to ensure an equitable reality for women and girls and supports women's equal participation in all aspects of life. UNW coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality and in all deliberations and agreements linked to the 2030 agenda. This organization as a whole works to demonstrate gender equivalency as a necessary step to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and a more inclusive world.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

The protection of women's rights in conflict zones is one of the most urgent and complex challenges facing the international community today. In the chaos of armed conflict, women and girls often bear the brunt of violence and instability, suffering not only physical harm but also psychological trauma, displacement, and systemic discrimination. From sexual violence used as a weapon of war to the denial of basic needs like healthcare and education, the threats to women's safety and dignity are both widespread and devastating.

Conflict can result in higher levels of gender-based violence against women and girls, including arbitrary killings, torture, sexual violence and forced marriage. Women and girls are primarily and increasingly targeted by the use of sexual violence, including as a tactic of war. While women and girls are in general more predominantly subject of sexual violence, men and boys have also been victims of sexual violence, especially in contexts of detention.

Yet, amidst these harsh realities, women are not merely victims—they are powerful agents of change. History shows that when women participate meaningfully in peace negotiations and post-conflict rebuilding, the chances of lasting peace and sustainable development significantly increase. However, despite the global recognition of their crucial role, women remain vastly underrepresented in peace processes and decision-making forums.

Seeking partnerships beyond borders

BACKGROUND OF THE AGENDA

Conflicts around the world have long had devastating effects on civilian populations, and women, in particular, suffer disproportionate harm. In war-torn regions, women and girls face a multitude of threats, including sexual violence used systematically as a weapon of war, forced displacement, loss of access to healthcare and education, and exclusion from political participation. These realities not only violate fundamental human rights but also hinder peacebuilding and development efforts.

The international community has increasingly recognized the importance of protecting women's rights in conflict zones. Landmark instruments such as the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, adopted in 1979, laid the foundation for advancing women's rights globally. More recently, **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325**, adopted in 2000, marked a pivotal moment by specifically addressing the impact of armed conflict on women and emphasizing their vital role in peace and security efforts.

Despite these frameworks, the implementation of protections for women in conflict remains uneven and often inadequate. According to **UN Women**, one in three women globally experience physical or sexual violence, with rates spiking in conflict and post-conflict settings. The use of sexual violence as a tactic of war continues in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, and Myanmar, where impunity for perpetrators remains a serious issue.

Efforts to include women in peace negotiations have shown promising results; studies reveal that peace agreements are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years when women participate in their creation. Yet, women's representation in formal peace processes is still alarmingly low — less than 15% of negotiators are women worldwide.

Situation of women in conflict zones:

More than 600 million women and girls lived in conflict-affected countries in 2022, a 50 per cent increase since 2017. Civilians around the world need greater humanitarian aid than ever before—but countries are instead increasing military spending, which topped USD 2.2 trillion in 2022.

A growing share of the world's population lives under autocratic rule, after many years of democratic backsliding. Misogyny is a common thread in the rise of authoritarianism, as well as the spread of conflict and violent extremism.

In Afghanistan, for example, the Taliban have issued more than 50 edicts to suppress women's and girls' rights, returning to the oppression of the 1990s.

According to one study cited in the report, incidents of political violence targeting women increased by 50 per cent in conflict-affected countries between 2020 and 2022.

The number of people in need of humanitarian aid increased by 25 per cent over the last year, and at the same time the world is undergoing the largest global food crisis in modern history. Much of this increase in need has been driven by nearly 200 armed conflicts and organized violence, as well as by the climate crisis and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Case Studies:

IRAQ - In Iraq, particularly in conflict-ridden regions like Samarra, the rights and safety of women and girls have come under severe threat. Years of instability, coupled with displacement and the collapse of community structures, have left women extremely vulnerable to domestic abuse, early marriage, and sexual violence. According to the UN Trust Fund, more than **4.1 million people in Iraq require humanitarian assistance**, with a significant number being women and children.

To address these urgent needs, the **Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI)**, in partnership with the **UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women**, launched a three-year initiative focused on women survivors of violence. This program established a network of **safe shelters across northern and central Iraq**, offering a critical lifeline to women escaping abusive households or conflict-related violence. These shelters provide **legal aid, psychological counseling, and vocational training** — helping survivors not just to heal, but also to reclaim their independence.

Importantly, the initiative has helped **hundreds of women obtain civil documentation** (like IDs and birth certificates), which are essential for accessing education, employment, and public services — things many had lost access to due to displacement. In an environment where formal justice systems often fail women, the program has stepped in to fill dangerous gaps with grassroots, community-driven support.

Sierra Leone's Rainbo Sexual Assault Referral Centres

During Sierra Leone's brutal civil war (1991–2002), gender-based violence escalated to a catastrophic level. Physicians for Human Rights estimated around **257,000 women and girls** were raped, with **76%** enduring gang rape and **6%** forcibly impregnated.

In response, the **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** and the Sierra Leonean government established three **Sexual Assault Referral Centres**—known locally as “**Rainbo Centres**”—in Freetown (2003), Kenema (2004), and Kono (2005). From March 2003 to September 2005, these centres served approximately **1,769 survivors**, **75%** of whom had been raped.

Each Rainbo Centre provided holistic, free-of-cost services:

- **Medical aid** (forensic exams, STI/HIV testing, pregnancy care)
- **Psychosocial support** and confidential counseling
- **Legal advocacy**, including access to medical certificates essential for prosecutions
- **Material assistance** like food, clothes, and transport to help survivors start recovery.

Staffing was carefully planned: eight female doctors were trained in Freetown to ensure survivors had the option of seeing a female physician; similar arrangements were in place at provincial centres. These centres were widely recognized by **UNHCR in 2004** as a best-practice model for responding to sexual violence in conflict settings.

PAST UN RESOLUTIONS AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Over the past two decades, the United Nations has taken several significant steps to address the protection of women in conflict zones. The turning point came in 2000 with the adoption of **UN Security Council Resolution 1325**, which was the first to formally recognize the unique impact of conflict on women and the vital role they play in peacebuilding. It emphasized the need for women's participation at all stages of peace processes—before, during, and after conflict. This resolution laid the foundation for what is now known as the **Women, Peace & Security (WPS) agenda**. Over the years, this framework has been expanded through additional resolutions such as 1820, 1888, 1960, and 2242. These documents pushed for the prosecution of sexual violence as a war crime, the deployment of gender advisors in peacekeeping missions, and increased accountability for those who violate women's rights in conflict.

Beyond policy, the UN has made efforts on the ground through the deployment of **Women Protection Advisers** in conflict regions such as South Sudan, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These advisers work directly with local communities and peacekeeping missions to identify threats, protect women, and ensure gender-sensitive responses in conflict zones. Training programs for peacekeepers have also been enhanced to include modules on preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence. Additionally, the UN has helped fund and establish trauma centers, shelters, and legal aid services for survivors of wartime violence, such as the Rainbo Centres in Sierra Leone and women's safe spaces in Iraq. Justice has been another important area of focus. Through partnerships with international tribunals and courts, the UN has helped secure landmark legal victories for women. One of the most notable cases was the **Akayesu judgement** from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which for the first time recognized rape as a form of genocide. This precedent set a powerful legal foundation for addressing sexual violence as a weapon of war, and similar accountability mechanisms have since been used in other conflict zones.

The UN has also invested in promoting women's leadership in peace processes. While women continue to be underrepresented in negotiations, the UN has consistently advocated for their inclusion and supported countries in integrating gender perspectives in peace talks. Tools like the **PeaceFem mobile app** have been developed to share case studies and practical guidance for female mediators and negotiators. In some UN-supported dialogues, women have participated as delegates or advisors, including in Colombia, Yemen, and Libya, marking incremental progress in gender inclusion.

Financially, the UN has provided resources through mechanisms like the **UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women**, which supports grassroots organizations operating in fragile and post-conflict regions. These funds have gone toward initiatives that provide legal assistance, mental health counseling, and community education on gender equality. The UN continues to advocate for increased investment in these programs, arguing that women-led peacebuilding efforts are often more effective and sustainable than traditional approaches.

Conventions and Resolutions

The international community has established several legal frameworks and resolutions that specifically aim to safeguard women's rights during times of conflict. One of the most significant is the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. Often referred to as an international bill of rights for women, CEDAW obligates signatory states to uphold women's rights and eliminate discrimination in all forms, including during armed conflicts. While CEDAW does not focus exclusively on conflict situations, its principles have been interpreted and extended to conflict zones through **General Recommendation No. 30**, which specifically addresses women in conflict prevention, conflict, and post-conflict situations. This recommendation urges states to take action to prevent gender-based violence, prosecute perpetrators, and ensure women's participation in peacebuilding.

Complementing this legal foundation is a series of **UN Security Council Resolutions** forming the **Women, Peace & Security (WPS) agenda**. The landmark **Resolution 1325 (2000)** was the first to acknowledge the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and the need to involve them in peace processes. This resolution called for increased participation of women at decision-making levels, the protection of their rights, and the incorporation of gender perspectives in UN missions. It also urged all parties in armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Building on 1325, a series of subsequent resolutions have deepened the UN's commitment. **Resolution 1820 (2008)** recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war and linked it to international peace and security. **Resolution 1888 (2009)** strengthened leadership and accountability, calling for the appointment of a Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. **Resolution 1960 (2010)** introduced the idea of naming and shaming perpetrators, while **Resolution 2242 (2015)** encouraged gender-sensitive approaches in counterterrorism efforts.

In addition to these, **international humanitarian law**, particularly the **Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols**, plays a key role in protecting women in armed conflict. These treaties require all parties in a conflict to respect and protect civilians, with specific provisions ensuring the protection of women, especially pregnant women and mothers of young children, from attacks and inhumane treatment. Furthermore, the **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)** recognizes rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity and war crimes, reinforcing legal accountability for violations committed in conflict settings.

Together, these conventions and resolutions form a strong legal and normative framework. However, the challenge often lies not in the absence of laws, but in the **lack of implementation and enforcement**, especially in fragile or war-torn states where governance is weak. Despite this, these instruments remain crucial tools for holding states and perpetrators accountable and advocating for the rights and protection of women affected by war.

Remedies already being implemented and challenges faced in the implementation

In several conflict-affected regions, concrete remedies have been implemented to protect and empower women, often through collaboration between UN bodies, NGOs, and local communities. A powerful example is the **Safe from the Start initiative**, a joint UNHCR and UNFPA effort that integrates gender-based violence prevention right from the beginning of humanitarian crises. This approach ensures that refugee camps and emergency shelters are designed with women's safety in mind—through measures like proper lighting, secure sanitation facilities, and community-based protection patrols. Additionally, **Gender-Based Violence Information Management Systems (GBVIMS)** have been introduced in over 20 conflict-affected countries to help humanitarian actors securely collect and analyze data on violence against women, enabling faster and more informed responses.

On a more local level, community watch groups and survivor networks have been created, especially in countries like the Central African Republic and Myanmar, where local women are trained to recognize risk patterns, mediate minor conflicts, and report abuse. These grassroots structures often serve as lifelines for victims in regions where formal justice systems are absent or inaccessible. **Digital interventions** have also emerged in recent years: platforms like “**Mobile Justice**” or WhatsApp-based legal helplines allow women in conflict zones to document abuse, seek help anonymously, and receive real-time guidance—even in areas with limited mobility.

In terms of rehabilitation, **Cash-for-Protection** programs have been launched in countries like Yemen and Lebanon, offering direct financial support to women at risk or survivors of violence. This enables them to relocate, access medical treatment, or even start small businesses to rebuild their independence. Several educational initiatives, like the **Malala Fund's work** in Afghanistan and Nigeria, aim to keep girls in school during crises, recognizing that access to education significantly reduces vulnerability to exploitation, trafficking, and early marriage.

Yet, despite these remedies, substantial challenges continue to hinder implementation. One pressing issue is the normalization of violence in prolonged conflicts—where acts of sexual violence are often dismissed as unavoidable side effects of war. This mentality reduces urgency in response and weakens accountability. In many areas, women lack access not just to services but to basic documentation, making it difficult to access humanitarian aid, claim property, or report abuse. Humanitarian organizations often struggle to sustain gender-focused programming because of donor fatigue and shifting political priorities.

Language barriers, militarized zones, and distrust toward authorities further complicate outreach. In regions where customary law overrides formal law, efforts to deliver justice to survivors are often met with cultural pushback or are settled informally, usually favoring perpetrators. And while technology is a promising tool, digital surveillance and internet shutdowns in autocratic or conflict-prone states have exposed women rights defenders to new forms of harassment and risk.

SUGGESTION FOR ACTION

To effectively protect women's rights in conflict zones, the following actionable recommendations are proposed for Member States, international organizations, and other stakeholders:

1. Strengthen Legal Frameworks and Enforcement

- Ensure full implementation and domestic incorporation of international treaties like CEDAW and UNSC Resolution 1325.
- Promote accountability by supporting judicial mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court to prosecute perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Enhance local judicial systems to protect survivors and deter violations.

2. Increase Women's Participation in Peace Processes

- Mandate minimum quotas for women's representation in peace negotiations, mediation teams, and post-conflict governance.
- Provide leadership training and capacity-building programs for women leaders in conflict-affected areas.
- Support networks and platforms that amplify women's voices in peacebuilding.

3. Improve Protection and Support Services

- Expand access to medical, psychological, and legal assistance for survivors of conflict-related violence.
- Establish safe zones and shelters in conflict and post-conflict areas.
- Invest in education and economic empowerment programs targeting women and girls to aid long-term recovery.

4. Enhance Data Collection and Reporting

- Strengthen monitoring systems to collect gender-disaggregated data on violence and human rights violations in conflict zones.
- Support transparency and reporting through UN mechanisms and civil society partnerships.

5. Foster International Cooperation and Funding

- Encourage donor countries to allocate increased, sustained funding for women-focused peace and security initiatives.
- Promote collaboration between UN agencies, NGOs, and governments to coordinate efforts and avoid duplication.

6. Raise Awareness and Change Cultural Norms

- Implement community-based programs to challenge harmful gender norms and reduce stigma against survivors.
- Support media campaigns that highlight women's contributions to peace and security.



STATISTICS AND DATA

Violence Against Women in Conflict

- According to **UN Women**, approximately 1 in 3 women globally experience physical or sexual violence, with the numbers significantly higher in conflict-affected areas.
- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** reports that sexual violence is used as a weapon of war in at least 14 conflict zones worldwide, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, and Myanmar.
- Over 50% of displaced women in conflict zones report incidents of sexual violence, according to a **UNHCR** study.

Women's Participation in Peace Processes

- Women represent less than 15% of negotiators, mediators, and signatories in major peace processes globally, as noted by the **UN Women Global Study on UNSCR 1325**.
- Peace agreements involving women's participation are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years, according to research by the **Council on Foreign Relations**.

Access to Services

- In conflict zones, maternal mortality rates are often two to three times higher than in peaceful regions, largely due to lack of healthcare access.
- Girls in conflict-affected countries are twice as likely to be out of school compared to boys, according to **UNICEF**.

Funding and Aid

- Only about 2% of international aid in conflict-affected countries is dedicated specifically to gender equality and women's empowerment programs, based on data from the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**.

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

Year	Event
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NATH VALLEY MUN 9.0

1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted, affirming fundamental rights for all, including women.
1979	CEDAW adopted, establishing international standards for eliminating discrimination against women.
1993	UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted.
1995	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasizes women's rights in conflict and peace.
2000	UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security adopted, marking a turning point.
2008	UNSCR 1820 addresses sexual violence as a tactic of war.
2009	UNSCR 1888 establishes Office of Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.
2010	UNSCR 1960 strengthens monitoring and reporting of sexual violence.
2013	UNSCR 2106 further enhances protection and victim support.
2019	UNSCR 2467 focuses on justice and survivor-centered approaches.
2020s	Increasing global focus on women's leadership in peacebuilding and gender-sensitive peacekeeping.

Seeking partnerships beyond borders

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

NATH VALLEY MUN 9.0

1. How can early warning systems and rapid-response mechanisms be designed or improved to specifically protect women at the onset of conflict?
2. What role should local, women-led organizations and community-based protection groups play in safeguarding women's rights during conflict, and how can they be better funded and supported?
3. How can access to essential services—such as healthcare, legal aid, trauma counseling, and shelter—be ensured for women, especially in rural, occupied, or displaced areas?
4. What measures can be taken to ensure accountability for crimes such as sexual violence, trafficking, and exploitation in regions where formal justice systems are absent or compromised?
5. How can regional or international human rights bodies be empowered to take action when national governments fail to protect women in conflict settings?
6. What strategies can ensure that women are not just included but meaningfully involved in peace negotiations, reconstruction planning, and governance?
7. How can disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs be made more gender-sensitive and accessible to women affected by armed conflict?
8. What policies can encourage long-term resilience—such as access to education, economic opportunity, and digital inclusion—for women in post-conflict societies?
9. How should humanitarian aid be structured to avoid gender-blind responses and actively prevent secondary harm to women?
10. What mechanisms can be introduced to monitor and evaluate the implementation of gender-focused provisions in post-conflict recovery efforts?

FURTHER RESOURCES

- <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/armed.htm>

- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/womens-human-rights-and-gender-related-concerns-situations-conflict-and-instability>
- <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security>
- <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/womens-rights-in-armed-conflict-under-international-law/fragmented-protection-of-womens-rights-in-conflict/1F7E857E35AD80D99B26F23CC8C55D24>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/04/us/domestic-violence-international.html>
- <https://unf.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/08/case-study-supporting-women-and-girl-survivors-of-violence-in-iraq>
- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142207>
- <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security>
- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/general-recommendations>

