

## Oslo Conference on Ending Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises

### Joint Civil Society Statement

Oslo 23 May, 2019

Civil society from 56 countries, representing 110 national and 55 international NGOs, have come together to highlight best practices and lessons learned in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in humanitarian crisis. From grassroots movements, local women's groups, women-led organisations, child-centred organisations, and non-governmental organisations<sup>1</sup>, we have strengthened our partnership and cooperation across borders as first-line responders to sexual and gender-based violence.

A clear understanding of how systems of oppression and inequality are the root causes of all violence against women and girls (including the increased and exacerbated forms that present in humanitarian crises) must be shared by states and donors. Humanitarian responses must reflect this shared vision. These pre-existing gender inequalities and the intersections of age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and abilities these compound violence's against women and girls. Girls especially but also boys under the age of 18 often make up the majority of survivors of sexual violence in conflict-affected countries; sometimes more than 80% of those affected by sexual violence are children.<sup>2</sup>

When protection mechanisms fail, when economic structures are eroded, and when essential life-saving specialised GBV services are *not* prioritised – we fail women and girls.

We as civil society support women and girls to rebuild their lives, to regain their dignity, and to feel safe and secure amidst crisis – all of which promotes agency and the realisation of their human rights. We work with survivors of all ages to address these traumatic experiences, to help them heal and recover. We not only help individuals rebuild, we rebuild and reconnect entire communities. We ensure women and girls have access to survivor-centred physical and mental health care. We fight for universal access to quality sexual and reproductive health services (SRHR), the prevention of forced and unwanted pregnancies, access to family planning and safe abortions, treatment for traumatic fistula, and sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and we fight for their lives – as many of the health consequences, if not treated, result in death for the survivor.

Yet without the political will and financial resources – the continuation of this work remains elusive. We urge that the commitments made will guarantee that this work continues, supporting women and girls in the way they themselves define it. Donors must find practical ways to directly fund a diverse range of civil society organizations, while prioritising women-led organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> For brevity, throughout the statement these groups will be referred to as civil society.

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children (2013). Unspeakable Crimes against Children. Sexual Violence in Conflict. [https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/imce/docs/unspeakable\\_crimes\\_report.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/imce/docs/unspeakable_crimes_report.pdf)

It is now well documented that women and girls face violence at every stage of an emergency, yet in every crisis, conflict, and disaster we are still falling short. Stronger political commitments by states, donors and UN affiliated organisations are needed. We urge states, donors and UN to prioritise the following:

1. To ensure that all survivors of violence have access to comprehensive gender responsive, age and culturally appropriate, high quality and effective services and support. Services much include immediate life saving medical care, psychosocial support and case management, all of which are critical to recovery process
2. Expand access to safe and dignified SRHR services. Access to safe abortion care and post abortion care are essential especially given regressive foreign policies such as The Mexico City Policy also referred to the Global Gag Rule.
3. States shall uphold their accountability to affected population, through safeguarding humanitarian access to provide life-saving specialised SGBV services where the needs are greatest.
4. Adherence and accountability to resolutions, conventions and other international legal instruments, which protect and safeguard women and girls across the world is of critical importance.
5. States and UN agencies create space for grassroots movements, local women's groups, women-led organisations, child-centred organisations, and non-governmental organisations to engage on developing international and national policies, strategies and programmes that protect women and girls affected by crisis.
6. States allocate budgets to implement resolutions and conventions which protect women and girls in conflict and crisis situations and uphold international laws and conventions.
7. Strengthen and increase access to justice for sexual and gender-based violence is vital. States must ensure that perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence, including those with command or superior responsibility, are held accountable to national, regional and international law. In all justice processes survivors and witnesses must protected and understanding of the complexity surrounding such laws as mandatory reporting do not hinder access to services, and seek justice over the primary needs of survivors.
8. To prioritise humanitarian funding for life-saving specialised GBV-services, which are survivor-centred, gender- and age-appropriate.
9. Commit to having civil society in decision-making position when negotiating Humanitarian Response Plans and access to pooled funding at country level. Revise donor administrative requirements to ensure funding can be reached by grassroots organisations and local women-led organisations, as they know best what their communities need and this should be valued and respected.
10. Ensure that donors and country-based pooled funding mechanisms prioritise 12-month project cycles for ethical and safe GBV programming.
11. States and donors should strengthen and increase access and scale up initiatives for child and adolescent survivors. GBV and CP actors must come together to increase the

technical capacity, availability of and access to quality services for child and adolescent survivors of sexual abuse.

12. Increase funding towards institutional capacity building of civil society to participate in conflict resolution efforts.

We, representing 110 national and 55 international NGOs, applaud the Government of Norway for how they have included grassroots movements, local women's groups, women-led organisations, child-centred organisations, and non-governmental organisations through in-country consultations prior to the conference, and supported us to participate during this 2-day conference. Future international events should ensure that civil society is equal partners in the process from the outset. The provision of sponsorship for civil society, interpretation and language services, and visa applications should be a norm to allow for meaningful engagement in global humanitarian processes and discussions.

We represent 56 countries from civil society today. We held consultations in Bangladesh, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, and South Sudan. We came here to celebrate each woman and activist in this room. But more importantly we didn't come here to talk. We came here to demand action from states and donors to prevent and respond to sexual gender based violence in humanitarian crisis.