



WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

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## Women and Armed Conflict; International Justice auf Deutsch

In armed conflicts raging around the globe, soldiers and paramilitaries terrorize women with rape, sexual and other physical violence, and harassment. These tactics are tools of war, instruments of terror designed to hurt and punish women, wrench communities apart, and force women and girls to flee their homes. Women in [Sudan](#), [Iraq](#), [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [Rwanda](#), [Kosovo](#), and [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) have reported brutal rapes, sexual assaults, sexual slavery, and mutilation committed by male combatants. In some cases, perpetrators first raped then killed their victims. Those who survived the attacks suffered from psychological trauma, permanent physical injury, and long-term health risks, especially HIV/AIDS.



Chechen women at the funeral of two sisters who were killed and whose bodies were burned in Chechnya. A third sister carried their remains across the border for burial. Ingushetia, 2000. © 2000 Peter Bouckaert/Human Rights Watch

Often, the end of war does not signal the end of violations against women. In the post-conflict period, many women confront discrimination in reconstruction programs, sexual and domestic violence in [refugee camps](#), and violence when they attempt to return to their homes. In [Afghanistan](#), women of all ethnicities have been compelled to restrict their participation in public life even after the fall of the Taliban to avoid being targets of violence by armed factions and those seeking to enforce repressive Taliban-era edicts. Afghan women, especially outside of Kabul, continue to face serious threats to their physical safety, denying them the opportunity to exercise their basic human rights and to participate fully and effectively in rebuilding their country. In [Iraq](#), insecurity and fear of sexual violence and abduction are keeping women in their homes and out of schools or away from work.

Until recently, many viewed violence against women as an inevitable, if regrettable, consequence of war. This attitude guaranteed impunity for perpetrators, effectively silencing women who suffered gruesome sexual and physical

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abuses. The creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and the International Criminal Court hold out some hope that women in war-torn countries might finally gain greater access to justice for crimes of sexual violence. Since 1998, these tribunals have convicted individuals of rape as an instrument of genocide, a form of torture, and a crime against humanity.

- [Human Rights Watch Work on Women and Armed Conflict; International Justice](#)

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