



PRIO

## Claims About Global Decline in Sexual Violence Spark Debate

PRIO Gender, Peace and Security Update

Issue 4 2012

The PRIO Gender Peace and Security Update is an electronic newsletter published by PRIO's Gender Team in response to growing interest among the public for information about women, peace and security issues. The newsletter will keep readers informed of the latest developments both internationally and in Norway in relation to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security and subsequent resolutions.



Ragnhild Nordås, PRIO Senior Researcher and expert on sexual violence in conflict. Photo: PRIO.

In this year's final edition of the PRIO Gender, Peace and Security Update, we give center stage to a topic of great public and academic interest: The publication of the [Human Security Report 2012. Sexual Violence, Education and War: Beyond the Mainstream Narrative](#), and its claims that sexual violence is declining globally, sparked a debate among scholars and researchers, creating newspaper headlines and several blog entries.

Reactions to the claims made in the report include a [commentary blog entry](#) written by researchers Amelia Hoover Green (Drexel University), Dara Kay Cohen (Harvard Kennedy School) and Elisabeth Jean Wood (Yale University), who work with several PRIO researchers also involved in leading research on sexual violence in conflict. This was followed by a [reply from Andrew Mack](#), director and editor-in-chief of the report.

Below we present a commentary written by PRIO Senior Researcher Ragnhild Nordås, highlighting the problems related to Human Security Report's claims of a global decline in sexual violence in conflict. The original Norwegian version of this commentary was printed in the Norwegian newspaper Dagsavisen on 16 November 2012, and is available [online](#). Further, and testifying to the importance of these issues, PRIO has recently been awarded a research grant from the Norwegian Research Council to carry out the project "Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict" (see separate story). ■

### 'Sexual Violence on the Decline?'

Ragnhild Nordås, Senior Researcher, PRIO

The recently launched Human Security Report 2012 rejects the assumption that sexual violence in conflict is an ever-increasing problem. It claims, on 'indirect' evidence, that there is reason to believe that we are observing a decline in the problem. This created newspaper headlines and keen debate in the blogosphere. The focus on decline or not may sidetrack important debates on how to solve the problem of sexual violence.

#### An overlooked problem

Sexual violence occurs in many conflicts, and carries with it immense physical and psychological suffering. It not only affects those directly attacked and their families, but society as a whole. For a long time sexual violence in conflict was an overlooked problem. However, over the past years, we have observed increased atten-

tion to the serious consequences of rape and sexual violence in conflict. But a full understanding of the problem is unfortunately still lacking.

There has been a steady increase in reports of sexual violence in conflict. This does not necessarily reflect a similar change in the magnitude of the problem, but the amount of attention now directed at the problem may finally create a much-needed focus on finding solutions.

In order to contribute to solving the problem of sexual violence in conflict, we need a better mapping of the problem, and a more nuanced discussion about what might explain the significant variation we see in the occurrence of sexual violence across armed actors, conflict situations, and over time. The new focus on whether the trend is increasing or not risks diverting the debate.

#### Speculations about an increase

A commonly held belief is that sexual violence is strongly on the rise. Today, sexual violence in conflict is mentioned more often, and portrayed as more brutal and systematic than before. For example, in 2007 Jan Egeland, former UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, claimed that rape in war had reached epidemic proportions.

The Human Security Report (HSR), however, attacks the assumption that there is a global rise in sexual violence in conflict. The main argument is that there is little data to support such an assumption, which is correct. The problem is that the report continues with speculations about a decline in sexual violence in conflict over the past years.

#### Speculations about a decline

The claim about a possible decline is based on what the report calls “indirect evidence”, and the reasoning is as follows: The number of conflicts is declining, and so is the number of battle deaths. Research from PRIO and other places confirms this. Further, however, HSR assumes that because the number of battle deaths is declining, this must

also be the case for sexual violence. This is most likely a misguided assumption. Using the number of battle deaths as a measure for the scale of sexual violence will have large sources of error. There are many examples of armed groups which are responsible for large numbers of battle deaths but perpetrate little sexual violence, such as the Shining Path in Peru. There are also groups that seemingly turn sexual violence into their trademark, without causing many deaths on the battlefield. We also know that sexual violence often continues when conflict has officially ended. In some cases, such as in Eastern Congo, violence is extreme and extensive.

#### The allure of numbers

Norwegian authorities and the UN have demanded more data and knowledge, so that policy on combating sexual violence in conflict can be founded on more reliable evidence. More systematic data and more thorough analysis are needed to understand and prevent sexual violence in conflict.

We do not know how many are affected by sexual violence in total, and we probably never will. But do we need such a figure? Even if we managed to produce

such a number, it would not prove particularly useful for anything other than creating newspaper headlines.

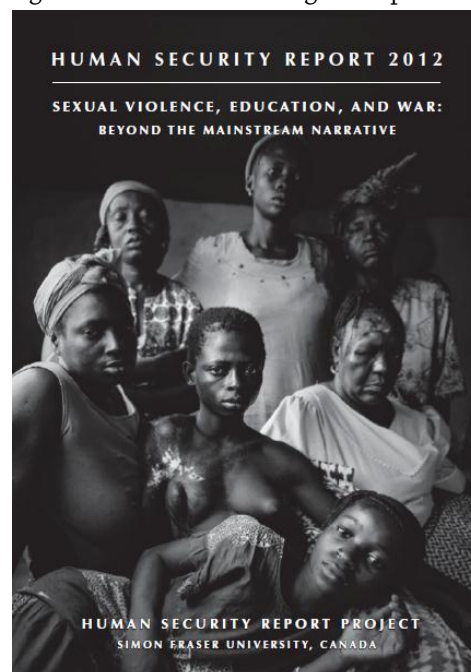
In order to prevent sexual violence we need to know when the danger of sexual violence is most acute, in what situations it happens, which groups are most vulnerable for targeting at any given time, who the perpetrators are, what types of sexual violence they perpetrate, and what this can tell us about why they do it. We now see the contours of some preliminary findings, based on recent years’ research.

Research shows a relationship between how soldiers are recruited and the occurrence of gang rape. We also see that some actors increase the use of sexual violence ahead of peace negotiations, probably to threaten their way into the negotiations. Sexual violence is also more often committed by state militaries, than by rebel or militia groups. This calls for higher pressure on the governments of these countries.

We still need better data and more thorough analysis to understand the reasons for sexual violence, and to establish effective counter measures. Possible steps would be to make reporting on sexual violence routine when entering peace agreements and at the establishment of truth commissions, to have a more clear focus on protection of vulnerable groups, a stronger focus on the prosecution of perpetrators, and more pressure on states whose militaries perpetrate sexual violence.

#### Optimism

The problem of sexual violence in conflict is higher on the agenda today. Prosecution of perpetrators has begun, such as in the trials following the conflicts in the Balkans and the Rwandan genocide. Research from PRIO suggests that the number of armed groups perpetrating sexual violence on an extremely large scale is smaller today than a few years ago. This cannot tell us about an increase or decline in the number of victims, but it tells us that we over time may focus on a smaller number of perpetrators.



**The Human Security Report 2012, which claims a global decline in sexual violence. Author: Andrew Mack.**

Several important research projects seeking to uncover possible solutions to the problem of sexual violence have been initiated. Variations in conflict-related sexual violence that were overlooked before are now subject to systematic research. With better insight into these variations, we can learn more about how to prevent sexual violence. This is where we can find solutions, not in speculations about a global increase or decline. ■

## PRIO Receives Funding for Research on Sexual Violence

PRIO recently received the news that the Norwegian Research Council will fund a 3-year research project on sexual violence in armed conflict. The project is led by Inger Skjelsbæk, and involves PRIO researchers Ragnhild Nordås, Gudrun Østby and Helga Malmin Binningsbø. In addition, the project will involve a network of international scholars in various

capacities, in particular Dara Kay Cohen (Harvard Kennedy School) who has been collaborating with PRIO for the last two years in establishing the global SVAC database.

The research project we are starting up in 2013 responds to the critical need for more systematic data on sexual violence. The project will continue to expand on the global database of sexual violence in armed conflict, and will include a stronger focus on post-conflict settings, as well as rigorous case studies. Patterns of sexual violence will be studied related to several critical dimensions, in and across conflicts and conflict actors, including the immediate aftermath of war and (for some cases) the pre-war era. This project therefore aims to advance the research on sexual violence, and facilitate evidence-based preventive strategies.

Over the course of 2013-2015, the research team will organize academic workshops and a more policy-oriented conference, as well as engage relevant policy and NGO actors to contribute to knowledge production and dissemination of research findings. ■

## Bineta Diop Special Guest at Research Network Meeting

The Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security held this year's second meeting on 7 December at PRIO. Participants enjoyed a series of presentations and debates on topics ranging from how developments in international politics affect women's issues, to field studies from Liberia, South Sudan, and Afghanistan. Bineta Diop, Executive Director of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), was special guest speaker at the meeting.

Diop emphasized how Security Council Resolution 1325 has provided an arena for women to come together in dialogue, such as in the Manu River or Great Lakes regions. Further, her organization is currently pushing for the establishment of a Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security in the African Union. Diop also spoke of experiences related to women's role in preventing election violence from escalating during the presidential elections in her home country Senegal in February this year. By mobilizing a network of observers and women's organizations and setting up a "situation room" in the capital Dakar, the women could communicate across the country and alert government authorities early on about any rising tensions. Other countries in Africa are now considering replicating this model. Finally, she described how she travelled to the Eastern Congo with her organization on a solidarity mission, reporting a desperate situation for the civilian population in the area.

The other speakers at this event were Mariann Murvoll (Coordinator for SCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MFA), Gro Lindstad (Director, Forum for Women and Development, FOKUS), Niels Jacob Harbitz (Senior Advisor,



The PRIO Researchers involved in the SVAC project: Inger Skjelsbæk, Helga Malmin Binningsbø, and Ragnhild Nordås. Gudrun Østby was not present. Photo: Cathrine Bye (PRIO).



**Bineta Diop (FAS), Mariann Murvoll (MFA), and Gro Lindstad (FOKUS). Photo: Jenny Lorentzen (PRIO).**

International Law and Policy Institute, ILPI), Christin Ormhaug (Senior Researcher, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, UMB), and Torunn Wimpelmann (Senior Researcher, Chr. Michelsen's Institute, CMI). ■

## Taking Women Beyond 1325

On 11-12 October, Lund University hosted the workshop 'Taking Women Beyond 1325'. The purpose of the workshop was to map and advance Nordic research expertise and knowledge on the broader

issues pertaining to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, including peacekeeping, peacebuilding and the post-national Nordic defence. The broader objective of the workshop was to make distinct Nordic contributions to academic research on women's agency and capacity to build peace in conflict and post-conflict societies.

The workshop was organized by a team of scholars from Lund University, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI). It was funded by the Nordic International Studies Association (NISA). The workshop was by invitation only and gathered a group of 26 scholars from the Nordic countries. Margot Wallström, former UN Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict, and now Chairperson of Lund University, gave the keynote speech. The workshop program can be accessed [here](#).

The first follow-up to the workshop will be a panel on 'Taking Women Beyond 1325' at the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention in San Francisco in March/April 2013. ■

## Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) Workshop in Oslo

In January 2012 the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) was established in Sweden. NCGM is responsible for capacity building, education and training on how to ensure integration of a gender perspective in planning, execution and evaluation of military operations. The centre conducts courses and seminars for individuals, among them future gender field advisors, flag officers and commanding officers, in order to build knowledge about how a gender perspective can increase operational effectiveness at all levels. The position of Section Head for Education and Training at the centre is currently held by a Norwegian.

On 11-12 September, NCGM conducted its third gender perspective workshop in Oslo, hosted by the Norwegian Defence University College/Norwegian Defence Command and the Staff College/Gender Project. The purpose of the two-day workshop, attended by representatives from the Armed Forces of Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway, was to share information, and to discuss and exchange experiences on how to improve the implementation of a gender perspective in military operations. More specifically, the workshop focused on how to cooperate and coordinate education and training. The revised NATO BI-Strategic Command Directive (SCD) 40-1 Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Gender Perspective into the NATO Command Structure from August 2012 was analyzed. ■



**Margot Wallström (former UN Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict, now Chairperson of Lund University), Annika Björkdal, and Annica Kronsell (both from Lund University). Photo: Ulrika Oredsson, Lunds Universitets Magasin.**

## International News

The **UN Security Council** held the annual open debate on Women, Peace and Security on 30 November. The theme for the debate was the role of women's civil society organizations and their contribution to the prevention and resolution of armed conflict and peacebuilding. The open debate was originally scheduled for 29 October but was postponed due to Hurricane Sandy. However, a [presidential statement](#) was adopted on 31 October.

A number of side events to the open debate took place. See the [UN Women website](#) for an overview.

The **Pacific Region** launched a Regional Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security on 18 October. For more information, see the official [press release](#).

**Ghana** launched a National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (GHANAP 1325) in October.

**Wilton Park** on 12-14 November organised a conference on 'Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict situations'. For more information, please visit the Wilton Park [website](#).

**Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice** recently published findings from a study showing that [sexual violence is more than just a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\)](#). Initial findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) reveal that domestic violence – that is, sexual violence in the home - is just as prevalent as in the context of conflict in North Kivu, eastern DRC.

**Lund University** in Sweden hosted the workshop 'Taking Women Beyond 1325' on 11-12 October (see separate story). ■

## News from Norway

The **Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs'** coordinating body for Women, Peace and Security (made up of government representatives, NGO representatives, researchers and other resource persons) held a meeting on 15 October. The meeting was opened by State Secretary Gry Larsen.

**Bergen Resource Centre for International Development** hosted a Literary Salon on the new book, "Gender Justice and Legal Pluralities: Latin American and African Perspectives" by Rachel Sieder and John McNeish (Eds) on 10 December. ■

## News from PRIO

The **PRIO Cyprus Centre** organized the conference 'Women's Peace: Applying UNSCR 1325 to Cyprus and the Region' on 6 December. [Conference programme available here](#).

The **Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security** held a meeting on 7 December (see separate story).

### Ragnhild Nordås

- Presented a paper on "Why Do Militias Attack Civilians? Violence by African Militias in Recent Armed Conflicts" (Co-authored with Dara Kay Cohen) at Conference on Paramilitaries, Militias and Civil Defense Forces, Yale University, October 19.
- Presented a paper on Why Do Militias Attack Civilians? Sexual Violence by African Militias in Recent Armed Conflicts (Co-authored with Dara Kay Cohen) at workshop organized by Folke Bernadotte Academy, Emory University, Atlanta, 22 October and at the Annual Peace Science Society Meeting, Savannah, GA, October 25.

- Published op-ed titled "Speculations about sexual violence" [[Spekulasjoner om seksuell vold](#)] in *Dagsavisen* 16 November.
- Interviewed in radio program *Dagsnytt Atten* at NRK P2 about sexual violence in armed conflict, November 20.
- Gave a presentation/update on PRIO Research on sexual and gender-based violence (with Inger Skjelsbæk) at meeting between Norad, researchers, and NGOs, 4 December.
- Participated at workshop on the book project "Gender in the Armed Forces", organized by the Norwegian Defense University College, 5 December.
- Attended the winter meeting of the Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security, 7 December.
- Interviewed by national Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* on sexual violence against men in war, December 9.

### Inger Skjelsbæk

- Attended the winter meeting of the Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security, 7 December.

### Helga Hernes

- Is a member of DCAFs International Advisory Board and participated in a meeting in Geneva on 28 and 29 November.
- Gave a lecture at Bjørknes University College on "Gender Dimensions of Security".
- Published an article on women's political participation, «[Kvinner politiske deltakelse](#)», in *Kvinner Sammen* no. 3, 2012.
- Attended the winter meeting of the Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security, 7 December.

### Torunn Tryggestad

- Presented a paper on "NATO as a champion of UNSCR 1325: The Role of the Nordic Countries in Transforming the Military Alliance" at the 'Taking Women Beyond 1325'

workshop, Lund University, 11 October.

- Attended the MFA co-ordinated 1325 network meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 October.
- Gave presentation/update on UN Security Council 1325 on Women, Peace and Security at brownbag organized by The Norwegian Peace Council), 23 October.
- Gave a lecture on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security at the MA Course in Gender and Conflict Studies, Bjørknes College, 12 November.
- Gave short presentation and participated in panel debate at the film seminar *The Sari Soldiers*, organized by the Norwegian UN Association, 20 November.
- Participated at workshop on the book project *Gender in the Armed Forces*, organized by the Norwegian Defense University College, 5 December.
- Organized the winter meeting of the Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security, 7 December.
- Met with a group of female Jordanian journalists visiting Oslo and PRIO in connection with the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to the European Union, 12 December. ■

**Gender Advisory Team (GAT) Cyprus (2012).** *Women's Peace: Recommendations of the Gender Advisory Team (GAT) on the peace negotiations in Cyprus*, PCC Policy Brief 01. PRIO Cyprus Centre, Nicosia. ■

## Other Recent Publications

**Blee, Kathleen M. and Sandra McGee Deutsch (Editors) (2012).** *Women of the Right: Comparisons and Interplay Across Borders*. Penn State University Press, Pennsylvania.

**Burnet, Jennie (2012).** *Genocide Lives in Us: Women, Memory, and Silence in Rwanda*. The University of Wisconsin Press.

**Carden-Coyne, Ana (Editor) (2012).** *Gender and Conflict since 1914. Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

**Carlman, Åsa (Editor) (2012).** *Equal Power- Lasting Peace. Obstacles for Women's Participation in Peace Processes*. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, Sweden.

**Cohn, Carol (2012).** *Women and Wars*. Polity Press, Cambridge.

**Detraz, Nicole (2012).** *International Security and Gender*. Polity Press, Cambridge.

**Sieder, Rachel and John McNeish (Eds.) (2012).** *Gender Justice and Legal Pluralities: Latin American and African Perspectives*. Routledge, London.

**St. Germain, Tonia and Susan Dewey (Editors) (2012).** *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: International Law, Local Respons-*

*es*. Kumarian Press, Sterling.

**Taylor, Sarah, Kristina Mader and Deborah Accurso (2012).** *Mapping Women, Peace and Security in the UN Security Council: 2011-2012. Report of the NGOWG Monthly Action Points*. NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, New York.

**The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (2012).** *Women Count: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325: Civil Society Monitoring Report 2012*. The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, New York.

**United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2012).** *Impacts of Population Dynamics Reproductive Health and Gender on Poverty*. United Nations, New York.

**UN Security Council (October 2012).** *Report of the Secretary General on Women, Peace and Security (S/2012/732)*. United Nations, New York.

**Ahall, Linda & Laura J. Shepherd (eds) (2012).** *Gender, Agency and Political Violence*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. ■

## Coming Events

**The Missing Peace Symposium 2012** on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post Conflict Settings will take place 14-16 February 2013 at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Washington, United States. Originally scheduled to take place on 1-3 November 2012, the event was postponed due to travelling restrictions caused by hurricane Sandy. For more information see [website](#). ■

## Recent PRIO Publications

**Gender Advisory Team (GAT), Cyprus (2012).** *Women's Peace in Cyprus: Recommendations of the Gender Advisory Team (GAT) on Implementing UNSCR 1325 Provisions on Women, Peace and Security*, PCC Report 3/2012. PRIO Cyprus Centre, Nicosia.



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