

AACC submission to the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) Open Session on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts in Africa

Founded in 1963, the All Africa Conference of Churches is an ecumenical fellowship representing more than 140 million Christians in 42 African countries working to make a difference in the lives of the people of Africa through ministries of advocacy and presence on the continental, regional and local levels.

Tuesday 23 July 2019

“No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel” (2 Samuel 13:12-14).

Sexual violence is a sin, a criminal act and is a war crime when it takes place in the context of an armed conflict. Wartime rape amounts to genocide when it is committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a population.

Sexual violence is used as a weapon of warfare; to terrorize and humiliate women, families and communities, and to dominate and instill fear. When it happens, often it is calculated and is brutal. Thousands of women and girls have suffered attacks, leaving them physically damaged and emotionally traumatized.

Dominant patterns include abduction of women and girls for forced marriage and rape perpetrated primarily by non-state armed groups (*egs Chibok girls abduction in April 2014*).

There are also incidences of rape, and gang rape committed by state agents, militias and unidentified armed men.

Long after a war has ended, survivors continue to face multiple challenges - among them persistent psychological problems such as anxiety and depression.

In this regard, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) calls:

- For **ZERO tolerance** of sexual violence in armed conflicts.
- For **all AU Member States** to put in place policies and laws that **criminalise** sexual violence including in armed conflicts and to domesticate international law on the same, and to combat impunity and lack of accountability.
- Engraining meaningful **participation of women in all peace processes**, and comprehensively **addressing conflict-related sexual violence in cessation agreements**.
- Facilitating for implementation of **UNSCR resolution 1325 on women, peace and security**.
- Empowering **faith communities**. When violated and dignity is taken, in most cases **faith** is what remains. The role of faith communities in giving **HOPE** to survivors of sexual violence including dispelling stigma and shame cannot be underestimated. This includes dealing with stigma associated with **children born of war or in captivity**.

- Making armed forces and others in positions of power to understand the relationship between **authority and perpetration, victim and vulnerability, and their liability** in the law of armed conflict when **such acts are committed under their command or with their knowledge**.
- Providing **safe reporting and supporting** mechanisms - Victims of sexual violence are a discrete, vulnerable group that is **often silent and is silenced for fear of victimization, stigma or shame**.
- Facilitating **timely human rights fact-finding missions** to conflict – affected areas such as those of the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR), the AU, and **allowing humanitarian agencies** to provide support services to survivors of sexual violence.
- Working alongside **survivors**, letting them **speak out, listening to them and engraining** their recommendations for lasting changes to halt recurrence in future conflicts.
- An **AU covenant on combating** Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts in Africa, and developing more implementation tools for guidance.

End.

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