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Transformation of conflicts and gender perspectives

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The conference addresses the links between HRE and conflict transformation, as well as gender perspectives within such a process. Cecilia is particularly concerned with dealing with conflict transformation in situations of armed conflict, according to the following division: pre-conflict, open-conflict, post-conflict.

Conflict transformation: A process by which people try to change a given situation of conflict into a relationship that is less violent, less unjust, less conflictual.

Jimenez states that everyone must keep their vision of a just society in mind

Resolving conflict with an unjust solution is not a true resolution.

True conflict transformation must be participative and guided by a vision of a just society.

Conflict prevention: try to stop escalation of conflict and consequences

Conflict resolution: process by which we try to resolve the conflict

Both highly related.

Why does gender matter in conflict transformation?

Statement from rebel commander Mindanao in which he gives priority to the attainment of ancestral rights before all other rights, and – notably – women's rights.

Participants completely disagree: fight for ancestral rights cannot be carried out without women; rights of women cannot be put aside. Women participate and suffer in the conflict as much as men; must be able to participate in the resolution of the conflict as much as men.

Cecilia summarizes that narrow goals of political agendas often disregard human rights, view HR as peripheral.

Internally displaced persons are mostly women – those are the ones who most often must flee their countries.

Importance of not generalizing women's experiences however. Women are not only the victims of armed conflicts.

In Columbia for instance, women actively participate in military groups.

Different visions of women. Different experiences.

There are also many cases in which women participate indirectly in conflict, in which they do not actually carry guns but still participate in the conflict.

Women who cook for the military, for instance, are often not considered part of the fighting force, but they are, just like male cooks. Women are often the victim of gender

stereotypes. Women's participation in armed conflict needs to be recognized, just as women need to take part in the process of conflict transformation.

Gender equality is a pre-requisite for any effective or sustainable transformation of conflict.

Women have very specific experiences, which must be taken into account in the process of transforming conflicts (e.g. rape).

Stages of violent conflict:

In all stages, women are affected differently than men

Pre-conflict: not yet escalated level

Mobilization of fighters, and also of activists responding; propaganda; increasing HR violations.

Open conflict: violence, death, destruction of social networks and families, affecting women particularly. Material shortages burden women in particular. Women constitute 80% of internally displaced persons.

Post-conflict: traumatism, political transitions - women are still suffering in particular; (there exist documented cases in which peace keepers have abused women in post-conflict situations – constitutes an ongoing concern of international community); peace negotiations, application of international law.

Only recently has rape been recognized as torture; war crime.

Tools for HR educators:

1-Gender as tool of analysis in pursuits of HR educators

2-Gender mainstreaming in making sure women are participating in decisions and transformations

3- Establishing a culture of HR tied to peace-building (pre-conflict)

Note: There is often a divide between peace negotiators and HR activists.

4- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – approved by HR activists: women need to participate fully in the legislation and decision making involved in peace negotiations. Peace negotiations must always involve a gender element.

- DDRR – Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation

5-Transitional justice, bringing criminal perpetrators to justice.

In South Africa, space opened up for women in the transitional justice system so that they may tell their stories of HR violations.

Women and girls should be viewed as actors and protagonists and not simply as “vulnerable groups”.

Questions and answers period

With respect to a question on women's participation in civil society during wars, Cecilia argues that there exist recurrent patterns in which at the end of conflicts women are forced to return to their traditional roles. Armed conflicts do not necessarily improve women's status in civil society.

In response to participants' questions on the relationship between conflict and development, Cecilia states that conflict is not destructive in itself, that conflicts can sometimes further dialogue and positive change. Conflict is a problem when it becomes destructive, violates HR etc (there is a conceptual difference between conflict and destructive conflict).

Answering a question regarding the risk that women can face when they speak out against the violations of their rights, Jimenez insists that there exist different strategies to address such a problem. She highlights the example of trials in South Africa, in which women were able to give testimony in private. She also stresses the important role needed to be played by HR educators at this point, in empowering victims and sensitizing populations.