

WOMEN ON THE FRONT LINE

A DOCUMENTARY FILM SERIES ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

First broadcast on BBC World on 19 April 2008 the seven-part series documents the different kinds of violence practiced against women and girls.

Presented by Annie Lennox, Women on the Frontline takes the front to the homes, villages, and cities of our world where a largely unreported war against females is being waged. We hear the victims give testimony and gain an insight into how widespread gender-based violence is:

Seven women directors have filmed for a year with survivors of gender based violence - honour killings, sex trafficking and torture - in seven countries where campaigns and grassroots media, as well as lawmakers' action, is making a difference to the rights and wellbeing of women.

Series Producer: Amanda Rudman

Executive Producer: Robert Lamb

Nepal: Filmed and directed by Fiona Melville

Turkey: Filmed and produced by Kim Hopkins

Morocco: Filmed and directed by Kim Hopkins

The Democratic Republic of Congo: Filmed and directed by Kristin Sellefyan

Austria: Filmed and co-directed by Ursula Sova and Patrick Burge

Mauritania: Filmed and directed by Kim Hopkins

Colombia: Filmed and directed by Margarita Martinez

Produced by:



Broadcast:



Major funding provided by:



Photo front: Lynsey Addario/VII Network; back: still from video filmed and co-directed by Ursula Sova and Patrick Burge. Concept & design: Real Design Associates/RDANY.COM

AN EXHIBITION ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:

CONGO/WOMEN PORTRAITS OF WAR: THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINE



CONGO WOMEN PORTRAITS OF WAR: THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: LYNSEY ADDARIO, MARCUS BLEASDALE, RON HAVIV AND JAMES NACHTWEY

Congo/Women is an international photography exhibition and educational campaign that raises awareness of the widespread sexual violence facing women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The exhibition features powerful life-size photographs that convey the strength and courage of Congolese women. Accompanying essays contextualize the impact of the crisis from a range of perspectives.

Congo/Women is co-directed by **Jane M. Saks**, Executive Director, Ellen Stone Belic Institute for the Study of Women and Gender in the Arts and Media, Columbia College Chicago and **Leslie Thomas**, Executive Director, Art Works Projects.

Exhibition Design: Art Works Projects and Real Design Associates/RDANY.COM

Design Team: Leslie Thomas, Greg Doench, Jürgen Riehle and Margot Perman

Identity and Graphic Design: Real Design Associates/RDANY.COM

Exhibition Coordinator: Sara Slawnik

Special thanks:

Christian Delsol, Media Specialist, UNFPA, Kipa L. Davis, Kristin Esch, Emma Ruby-Sachs, Jane Sachs, and Mariana Tosic

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There is no blanket approach to fighting violence against women. What works in one country may not lead to desired results in another. Each nation must devise its own strategy. But there is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable.

– Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Every human being has the right to live free of violence and discrimination. Yet, this right is being violated on a massive and systematic scale. Violence against women continues in every part of the world, limiting social and economic progress, and harming families, communities and nations.

The United Nations system is engaged in urgent action to help governments prevent, punish and eliminate violence against women. As a United Nations agency committed to rolling out the ICPD Programme of Action, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is proud to present this exhibition, and hopeful that it will raise awareness of the worldwide need to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence.

– Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA

Gender-based Violence – What is it?

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines the term as: “Any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. These acts include: spousal battery; sexual abuse, including of female children; dowry-related violence; rape, including marital rape; female genital mutilation/cutting and other traditional practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence; sexual violence related to exploitation; sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in school and elsewhere; trafficking in women; and forced prostitution.

The Beijing Platform for Action expanded on this definition to include: violations of the rights of women in situations of armed conflict, including systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy; forced sterilization, forced abortion, coerced or forced use of contraceptives; prenatal sex selection; and, female infanticide. It further recognized the particular vulnerabilities of women belonging to minorities; the elderly and the displaced; indigenous, refugee and migrant communities; women living in impoverished rural or remote areas, or in detention.

The ICPD Programme of Action and Gender-based Violence

Eradication of gender-based violence is a core target under the ICPD Programme of Action. It recommends that countries “take full measures to eliminate all forms of exploitation, abuse, harassment and violence against women, adolescents and children”. The links between gender-based violence and poor health outcomes are vital and both require a response through the primary and secondary health-care systems. UNFPA’s contributions in this area is a major part of its leading role within the UN system in furthering gender equality and women’s empowerment, in line with the goals of the ICPD.

Why does Gender-based violence overwhelmingly impact women and girls?

While gender-based violence can occur against women and men, girls and boys, UNFPA’s focus remains on tackling violence against women and girls, since it is they who are overwhelmingly affected. This is not to state that sexual abuse of adolescent boys and the sexual exploitation of young men are not of grave concern to UNFPA. Women and adolescent girls are not only at high risk and primary targets for gender-based violence but also suffer exacerbated consequences as compared with what men endure. As a result of gender discrimination and lower socio-economic status, they have fewer options and resources to avoid or escape abusive situations and to seek justice. They also suffer sexual and reproductive health consequences, including forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and resulting deaths, traumatic fistula, and higher risks of sexually transmitted infections and HIV issues which are at the core of the UNFPA programming mandate.

HIV and Gender-based Violence

Violence and the threat of violence can increase women and girls’ vulnerability to HIV by making it difficult or impossible to set the terms of an equal relationship. It is more difficult for women to refuse sex when in a relationship, to get their partners to be faithful, or to use a condom. Violence can also be a barrier in accessing HIV prevention, care, and treatment services. The linkages between sexual violence and HIV, especially among young women in high prevalence countries, are well-documented. The ICPD Programme of Action recommends actions designed to prevent, reduce the incidence of and provide treatment for STDs, including HIV and AIDS. UNFPA has been undertaking a multi-pronged and multi-sectoral approach that include: the formulation and monitoring of national HIV and AIDS plans, service-delivery efforts, awareness and advocacy initiatives, capacity development of stakeholders and mainstreaming HIV and AIDS prevention and response processes in all post-conflict settings.

Fistula and Gender-based Violence

Both obstetric and traumatic fistulas are major reproductive health and human rights concerns for women and adolescent girls. Traumatic

gynecologic fistula - an injury that can result from violent sexual assault - require highly specialized treatment and interventions, including clinical and psychological care and access to referral and legal systems. In many communities, women with fistula are considered “unclean” and stigmatized. One of the tragedies of fistula is that it frequently affects adolescent girls, who are at greater risk of complications during childbirth and tend to have less access to health services. The ICPD Programme of Action calls for skilled attendance at birth and a number of UNFPA country offices have undertaken holistic initiatives to address this serious reproductive health issue. UNFPA and its partners have launched the first-ever global campaign to end obstetric fistula - this campaign is a big step forward in bringing this major reproductive health issue to the public domain.

Maternal Health and Gender-based Violence

The linkages between gender inequities, gender - based violence and maternal morbidity can be felt at various levels and through varying forms—from exposure and vulnerability to HIV and AIDS/other STDs, rape (and other forms of sexual assault during conflict), life - altering conditions like obstetric and traumatic fistula, inequitable access to health-care facilities and unwanted/early pregnancies to exposure to discriminatory and harmful practices like forced or early marriages and female genital mutilation. And violence during pregnancy - an especially neglected form of abuse - has serious repercussions for infant and maternal health outcomes. To achieve the ICPD objectives of promoting the right of women to health and to safe motherhood, UNFPA adopts a 3-pronged strategy that includes promoting access of all women to contraception to avoid unintended pregnancies; access to skilled care at the time of birth; and, timely access for all those with complications to quality emergency obstetric care.

Trafficking as a form of Gender-based Violence

Globally, men and women, boys and girls are trafficked for their labour and work in horrifying conditions. Because of their subordinate position in many societies, women and girls are most vulnerable. Trafficked women and girls suffer from rape and sexual violence, unintended and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, lack of access to contraception and to quality health care and counseling and are vulnerable to HIV. In view of the clear linkages between trafficking and the violation of reproductive health and rights, UNFPA strategies and interventions to address trafficking include information and awareness raising campaigns about the health consequences; campaigns targeting males and boys; provisioning of reproductive health services and counseling to victims and survivors; technical assistance and training for governments; and promoting policy dialogue and cooperation between countries who are receivers and senders of trafficked individuals.

Rape as a form of Gender-based Violence

A large proportion of women and girls are subjected to sexual and physical abuse, including rape, by family members, acquaintances, and strangers. Rape, as well as other forms of sexual abuse, is not only a violation of the basic human rights; it also fuels reproductive health problems - including unwanted or complicated pregnancies, unsafe abortions, fistula, STDs and HIV - and causes their recurrence. Women and girl survivors of rape and other forms of sexual abuse face acute psychological and social consequences. Their vulnerability to opportunistic rape and other forms of sexual violence during conflict, post-conflict and natural disasters have led to UNFPA adopting multi - sectoral, holistic approaches to preventing and responding to rape and other forms of violence during emergencies and to establishing systems for coordinating response efforts. This is very much in line with the ICPD’s Programme of Action that calls for elimination of all forms of exploitation, abuse, harassment and violence against women, adolescents and children.

Gender-based Violence during Emergencies

Gender-based violence is especially problematic in the context of emergencies and natural disasters, where civilian women and children are often targeted for abuse, and are the most vulnerable to rape and various forms of sexual exploitation. The perpetrators include official armies as well as civilian armed groups. Recognising that women and girls are often the most vulnerable during emergency situations and settings, UNFPA has focused efforts in ensuring that all women and girls have access to safe sexual and reproductive health services at all phases of a crisis.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting as a form of Gender-based Violence

Societies that practice female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) consider the practice not as a form of violence but rather perceive it as beneficial to the girl and the society as a whole. From a human rights perspective, FGM/C is rooted in a culture of discrimination against women and girls and control of their sexuality. It is linked to their unequal societal position in political, social and economic structures where it is practiced. The ICPD Programme of Action recognizes that harmful practices, including FGM/C, are a violation of basic rights and a major lifelong risk to women’s health. UNFPA addresses the practice of FGM/C because of its harmful impact on the reproductive and sexual health of women and because it is a violation of fundamental human rights. A holistic approach to targeting FGM/C is taken within its cultural and religious context; however, it reiterates that cultural arguments cannot be used to condone such harmful practices.

Text: Upala Devi