



IRC policy brief

Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict

June 10th – 13th 2014

IRC's work on gender based violence

The [International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) is recognised globally as a leader in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls (VAWG) in conflict and other emergencies. Our comprehensive approach supports the pursuit of IRC's broader vision: a world where women and girls live free from violence as valued and respected members of their community.

Through our work in over in 25 countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, our innovative programmes focus on providing care to women and girls who have experienced violence as well as tackling the root causes of abuse. We work through [five pillars](#) to help restore the dignity of survivors, and create opportunities for women and girls to rebuild and transform their lives are:

- **Provision of services for violence survivors:** we provide health and counselling services to help survivors heal.
- **Violence prevention:** we tackle the root causes of violence against women by working with men, community groups and local institutions.
- **Empowering women and girls:** We work on economic and social empowerment, giving women and girls gain financial stability and helping enhance their status in households and communities.
- **Research and learning:** In partnership with leading universities and research institutes, we study the effectiveness of our work and apply lessons learned to new projects being developed.
- **Advocacy:** We seek to empower women and girls to advocate for change and lobby internationally for the international community to redouble its efforts to prevent and respond to violence.

The IRC believes it is essential to keep women and girls at the centre of our work to end gender based violence (GBV). We seek to promote the safety, well-being and empowerment of women and girls because they have been specifically targeted in war and in peace times, because their priorities have been historically under-addressed, and because of pervasive gender inequality. However, we also provide services to men and boys who are survivors of sexual violence and engage men in preventing VAWG.

Our evidence-based programme on [Engaging Men in Accountable Practice](#) aims to reduce harmful behaviours and increase gender equality in the home. It gives men the opportunity to rethink their view on gender roles and prevent VAWG by changing their behaviour; it also provides women with opportunities to reflect on VAWG in their lives and influence the men within their community.

IRC's work on GBV emergency preparedness and response

The IRC has also invested particularly in **responding to GBV in emergencies** and preparing other partners to do so. In times of crisis and conflict, destruction, flight and upheaval grind down the protection women and girls have in times of stability, and they face even higher risks of physical and sexual violence – from armed groups, strangers, neighbours and family members.

The IRC has invested in building skills, strengthening partnerships and developing tools and procedures to provide life-saving services to GBV survivors in emergencies. Our [GBV Emergency Response Programme Model](#) has increased our field teams' and partners' capacity and confidence to respond to emergencies even in extremely challenging circumstances; resulting in faster deployments of trained teams to assess GBV needs and provide immediate, lifesaving services in the acute response window of 72 hours.¹

¹ All of IRC's GBV Emergency Response Programme Model's resources are available through our web-based platform GBV Responders Network (www.gbvresponders.org)

The ESVC Summit: an opportunity to advance on GBV in conflict and emergencies

The IRC welcomes the leadership of the UK government in tackling GBV, including through the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), the 2013 'Call to Action on Violence against Women and Girls in Emergencies' ([Call to Action](#)) and its ongoing efforts on supporting Women, Peace and Security at national and international levels.

Donors, multilaterals and NGOs working on tackling sexual violence and GBV in conflict and emergencies must **now translate commitments into a positive change in the lives of GBV survivors**, their families and communities. With this objective the IRC makes the following recommendations:

Donors, multilaterals and NGOs should address the root causes of GBV and adopt a survivor-centred approach in all efforts to tackle impunity, prevent and respond to GBV in emergencies:

- The ESVC Summit **outcome document should recognise that programmes to prevent and respond to GBV in emergencies are life-saving, not optional**. As such, they should be prioritised from the outset of an emergency response and complement investigation and documentation efforts.
- **All efforts to tackle GBV should aim to achieve gender equality**. The IRC recognises GBV as the most extreme manifestation of gender inequality mostly affecting women and girls; although we understand men and boys also experience sexual violence and need support. All programmes working on sexual and GBV should be driven towards achieving gender equality – as many cases of sexual violence against men and boys are also a manifestation of gender inequality (such as when they are sexually abused to humiliate them by putting them in a 'feminised' position').
- The **ESVC Summit's outcomes should ensure governments, policy makers and practitioners take a survivor-centred approach** to justice, especially the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict This requires: placing the same emphasis on survivor's safety and well-being as on tackling impunity; respecting survivors' decisions regarding their own participation in justice procedures; respecting survivor's informed consent; providing sustainable medical and psychosocial services regardless of survivors' decisions to pursue prosecution; and safe access to informal justice mechanisms. All GBV survivors participating in documentation and justice processes need safe and on-going access to health, counselling and livelihoods programmes.

The UK government should use this moment to commit to and strengthen key policies and processes related to GBV services in conflict and emergencies, particularly the 2013 Call to Action and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda's relief & recovery pillar:

- **Call to Action sessions during the ESVC Summit should galvanise new actors to endorse the [2013 Communiqué](#) and join the Call to Action process**. In particular, IRC encourages involvement from Southern governments, southern organisations, women's organisations, academia and other key actors in addressing VAWG in emergencies to join these sessions and [Call to Action](#) process.
- **Governments, multilaterals and NGOs that participated in the 2013 Call to Action should provide an overview of their progress in fulfilling their commitments at the Summit sessions on Call to Action**. During the November 2013 High Level event donors signed up to 12 commitments to better address VAWG in emergencies. Furthermore, 40 humanitarian actors made a total of 201 commitments. In looking forward, Call to Action supporters should bind each of their 2013 commitments to specific, measurable impacts within a defined time period. Only then will interdependent commitments be realised.
- **Sessions that discuss GBV emergency response should highlight the challenges faced by humanitarian actors in responding to the current acute emergencies**. Specifically, donors and multilaterals should address the issue of translating high level political commitments into action at regional and field levels.
- **The UK government should strengthen GBV humanitarian response within the relief and recovery pillar of the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP)**. All efforts to tackle sexual violence in conflict and GBV in emergencies should be coordinated within the NAP, including coordination with DfID's efforts on VAWG in emergencies and in accordance with DfID's VAWG Theory of Change.