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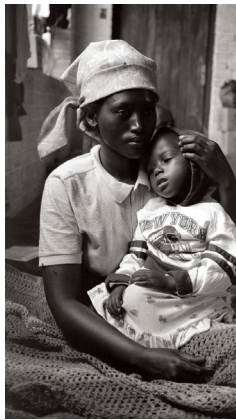
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# Inaction

the human cost



Seated on a bench, a woman volunteers comforts a sick baby in the dormitory of a UNICEF-assisted Centre for unaccompanied children in the town of Nyamata. Many women, who lost their own children in the genocide, help care for other orphaned children. © UNICEF/BETTY PRESS

## Trying to rebuild...

The costs of failing to prevent genocide are immense, whether measured in the number of lives lost or the suffering of survivors. According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), post-genocide Rwanda today has among the highest proportions of child-headed families in the world – some 42,000 households struggling to raise an estimated 101,000 children.

Of these, 95,000 were orphaned during the genocide.

The parents of the rest have been imprisoned for genocide-related crimes.

Many of these children do not go to school or eat regularly. Many more are at risk of exploitation and abuse. It is a generation that has lost its childhood and whose future is very much at risk.



Orphans from the Kimironko Orphan Village, Kigali. © Aegis Trust



© Aegis Trust

*"When you escape death, that's when you appreciate life. I think our future will be better than the last ten years. Today, even when something saddens me, I look for a reason to be happy. I want to work hard and get somewhere in life. I know no one will have pity on me just because I'm an orphan."*

Yves Kamurami, Rwandan genocide orphan



© Aegis Trust

*"Near the end, RPF soldiers took me to an orphanage in Butare. When I left the orphanage and started to look after my cousins, I was 16 or 17. Life goes on. I try to assure my cousins that things will change for the better. I believe God is with us and the future will be brighter. That's how we keep our morale up – even when we haven't had dinner. But sometimes we feel discouraged. When you have to miss dinner simply because there's no food, it's very distressing."*

Alice Uwimpahwe, an orphan running a household



"Today my life is full of pain... but the good you did has given me back hope." Clotilde Mugesha, whose jaw was blown off by a gunshot during Rwanda's genocide. Twelve years on, after three attempts at reconstructive surgery stalled due to lack of funding, she could not eat properly and had a potentially fatal infection. The Aegis Trust took her to the UK for life saving surgery, where her face is now being rebuilt. There are many survivors who, like Clotilde, continue to suffer terribly today as a result of the genocide. © Aegis Trust

## Sexual Violence

It is mainly women who bear the scars of violent conflict.

Rape committed during war is intended to terrorize the population, break up families and change the ethnic make-up of the next generation. Sometimes it is also used to render women from the targeted community incapable of bearing more children.

In the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), rape has been a means of warfare used by all groups in the conflict. In the case of Rwanda, an estimated 100,000-250,000 women were raped during the three months of genocide in 1994.

The needs of survivors are enormous, including:

- medical care, especially reconstructive surgery to repair damaged organs;
- HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services;
- legal redress to ensure that the attackers are caught and punished;
- psychological support and counselling to deal with the emotional trauma of the attack;
- financial support.

Too often the shame felt by a rape survivor, and the social stigma that follows, forces her to flee her home – either alone or with her family – leaving behind land, houses, other property and livelihood. This often leads to poverty, hunger and homelessness.

Cruelly, at a time when sexual assault survivors most need the support of the community and family, instead they often find themselves abandoned and rejected.



A Genocide War holers place in Rwanda. © James Smith/Aegis Trust

## Trying to rebuild...

Widespread rape against civilians is a crime against humanity:

- Under International Law
- Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

## No Safety Net

War typically destroys much of the support system women need:

- health centres are destroyed, depleted and/or lack the resources and skilled staff to meet rape survivors' needs;
- legal systems of countries in conflict often collapse;
- many countries lack legislation and trained supportive police forces to bring rapists to justice;
- most poor or war-torn countries lack trained counsellors or psychologists;
- many people are displaced from their communities or lose their means of self-support, leaving them poor and more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse.

War creates an environment in which rapists are unlikely to be caught or prosecuted. This creates impunity – the sense that perpetrators can escape the consequences of their crimes. Strengthening and enforcing laws against rape during or after conflicts can help end impunity and ensure that rapists are punished.

Community attitudes towards rape and the rapist also need to change. The way communities respond to sexual violence plays a large role in helping survivors rebuild their lives, as well as catching, punishing and deterring assailants.

Civil society and activist groups in all countries can raise awareness about rape and the status of women. They can help to create more support for women's rights and build support networks for women who survive sexual violence. Such groups can lobby for effective laws against violence towards women and better enforcement of such laws. Finally, they can help to build a much less tolerant environment for the men who sexually assault women, whether in peace or in war.



Anne-Marie survived rape by soldiers and Interahamwe militia members. Her husband was taken away and murdered and the youngest of her two children was killed in front of her. After the genocide, Anne-Marie learned that she was infected with HIV/AIDS.

*"Only my son gives me the strength to live. It is a miracle that I am still alive after ten years. If I can survive another two years, he will be a little older, and maybe he will have a chance in life; maybe he will not become a street child."*

Anne-Marie

Background picture: A guide comforting a survivor at the Kigali Memorial Centre. © Kay Halliwell-Sutton/Aegis Trust



UN Women is a United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. It is a global network of organizations working to advance gender equality and women's rights. For more information, visit [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org).

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