



ICRC

check against delivery

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
65th session

Third Committee

Item 28

Advancement of Women

Statement by the
International Committee of the Red Cross
New York, October 2010

Mr Chairman,

The international community has made significant and increasing efforts over the last decade to enhance the protection of and conditions for women. Indeed, the establishment of the *UN Women entity*, to contribute to gender equality and the empowerment of women, and the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict specifically highlight advances made in this regard. Further, given the 10th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, women's issues are very much at the forefront of the international agenda. However, the reality is that much still remains to be done

For its part, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) decided some ten years ago to emphasize across all its programmes and operational activities the particular respect and protection accorded to women and girls by international humanitarian law (IHL). At all times, the ICRC continues to stress the remarkable resilience and capacities of women. It is imperative that women are not seen just as passive victims, but also as actors able to respond to the situations in which they find themselves, overcome appalling suffering and ultimately emerge stronger. Women play a pivotal role in maintaining the welfare of their community. The ICRC thus re-affirms the importance of incorporating the diverse needs, perspectives, and capacities of women and girls in all its humanitarian activities.

To heighten its response to promoting the well-being of women, the ICRC has developed a multidimensional approach to identify and address the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls in conflict and other situations of violence. This requires recognition and understanding of the wide-ranging impact conflict can have on this population group. Women are frequently placed at the epicenter of conflicts, endangered not only because of their proximity to the fighting, but also because they are deliberately targeted as a method of warfare. In addition to the risk of bodily injury and sexual violence, war may compromise women's access to healthcare, result in their displacement and separation from family or affect their ability to access safe drinking water or food. It may also leave them without a breadwinner and with the responsibility of supporting their families on their own. It is therefore part of the ICRC's response to ensure that women affected by conflict benefit from appropriate protection and assistance.

An urgent theme when considering the needs of women during conflict is *prevention*. While it is imperative that the international community reacts to sexual violence as to any other war crime, it is also essential that Member States resolutely engage in *preventing* sexual violence.

For its part, the ICRC works to prevent sexual violence. Through various awareness-raising activities, the ICRC highlights that it constitutes a serious crime with severe repercussions for the victims that should entail severe consequences for the perpetrators. Through the promotion of IHL, the institution presses actively all parties to an armed conflict to respect the categorical prohibition of all forms of violence against women. Activities in the communities are often carried out together with Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, especially those aiming to break the taboo surrounding this issue and sensitise local communities so that survivors of sexual violence are not stigmatised.

The ICRC cannot stress enough the destabilizing effect sexual violence can have on a society when used as a tactic of war. Engaging women and victims of sexual violence in participatory prevention, protection and recovery programmes during and after conflict, promotes the role of women as actors in peacebuilding.

Mr. Chairman,

We would like to take this opportunity to recognize and honour the resilience and capacities of women and reaffirm the importance of ensuring women's active participation in their own solutions, including self-protection mechanisms and livelihood opportunities.

The ICRC urges UN Member States, as State Parties to the Geneva Conventions and other IHL treaties, to include in their national legislation provisions for better respect of women and girls at all times, particularly in times of war and other situations of violence. We would also like to further emphasize the urgency of putting a stop to sexual violence committed in connection with armed conflict. Rape is preventable; this must be recognised and determined action has to be taken.

Thank you.