



# ICRC

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**Item 28: Advancement of women**

International Committee of the Red Cross  
Statement delivered by Ann Deer

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*This statement will soon be available, in all six official UN languages,  
on the ICRC's website: [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org)*

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr / Madam Chair,

The consequences of armed conflict for women today can be devastating. Women are vulnerable to specific risks, such as sexual violence, and have particular needs, especially in the area of health care. International humanitarian law recognizes this: in addition to the general protection it affords women and men, it also contains specific provisions granting additional protection to women.

Sexual violence does incalculable damage of many kinds: physical, emotional and psychological. In addition to the harm it causes direct victims, sexual violence also has lasting consequences for society as a whole. Victims of sexual violence are at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; related risks include infertility and incontinence. They may also face stigmatization and rejection.

Rape, forced prostitution and other forms of sexual violence are prohibited by humanitarian law in both international and non-international armed conflicts. They often amount to war crimes or other international crimes. Those responsible must be held accountable.

In 2011, the 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent adopted a four-year action plan. It urges States and components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to take specific action to improve implementation of humanitarian law. This includes enhancing protection for women in armed conflict. States committed to taking appropriate legislative, judicial and administrative measures to fulfil their obligation, under humanitarian law, to protect women and girls. The ICRC reminds States of their duty to put an end to impunity and to prosecute serious violations of humanitarian law involving sexual violence.

Victims of sexual violence must have unimpeded access to suitable medical care, including mental-health services, and to indispensable psychosocial support. After suffering the trauma of sexual violence, women and girls may be put at further risk when they attempt to use health-care facilities. Hospitals and health-care centres are often damaged or destroyed in armed conflict or lack the medical personnel to treat victims. In this connection, the ICRC – together with the Movement – has embarked on a project entitled “Health Care in Danger,” which aims to improve delivery of and promote safe access to health care in armed conflict and other emergencies. This project will address the ways in which attacks on health-care personnel, facilities and vehicles, the deliberate and arbitrary obstruction of health-care provision, discrimination in the delivery of health care, and armed entry into medical facilities affect access to and delivery of health care: all this has consequences for women and children.

The ICRC strives to adopt a *comprehensive* and *multidisciplinary* approach to the issue of sexual violence: this encompasses preventive action, protection strategies aimed at addressing the causes and consequences of sexual violence, timely medical and psychosocial support for victims, and activities that foster their reintegration into society. The ICRC supports grassroots structures and capacity-building, with a view to training local women as psychosocial assistants and raising public awareness in order to mitigate stigmatization.

Mr / Madam Chair,

The international community has adopted universally agreed rules enshrined in humanitarian law that expressly prohibit rape and other forms of sexual violence. The ICRC calls on States to ensure respect for – and full implementation of – these rules.

Much has been done to bring to light the often taboo issue of sexual violence in armed conflict; however, there is still a long way to go. The commitment of States is crucial for preventing sexual violence in armed conflict and ensuring that those who do violate humanitarian law are held accountable.

In closing, the ICRC once again urges States to meet their obligation to protect women and girls under humanitarian law and to ensure unimpeded access to health care for all victims of sexual violence.

