



Veronique de Viguier / UNICEF Photo of the Week (12 September 2011). SUDAN.

## OVERVIEW

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE, EDUCATION, AND WAR: BEYOND THE MAINSTREAM NARRATIVE

**The 2012 *Human Security Report* continues the examination of the human costs of war that started with the previous *Report* and our analysis of the apparent paradox of child mortality rates that improved in more than 90 percent of the years in which countries have been embroiled in war since 1970.<sup>1</sup>**

Part I of the new *Report* examines the impact of wartime sexual violence on adults as well as children, and details some surprising revelations about the impact of war on educational systems.

As was the case with the previous *Report*, this year's counterintuitive findings pose a major challenge to a number of widely held assumptions about the human costs of war.

The focus of the first three chapters of Part I is sexual violence in wartime.

Rape and other sexual violations in wartime continue to pose a grave threat to human security in today's wars. They create massive suffering, inflict psychological trauma, disease, unwanted pregnancies, stigmatization, rejection, grievous injury, and sometimes death, on their victims—who are overwhelmingly female.

Long ignored, wartime sexual violence has become increasingly politically salient in the policy agendas of the international community over the past two decades. These changes are due in large part to the tireless investigations and increasingly effective advocacy campaigns of human rights and humanitarian organizations.

At the UN, other international agencies, and in the donor governments that provide assistance to war-affected communities, the issue of wartime sexual violence is now being addressed with a level of commitment that has long been needed, but too rarely provided in the past.

The mainstream narrative on wartime sexual violence that has emerged over the past two decades has been greatly influenced by a series of prominent UN reports and innovative initiatives—in particular, those associated with the Security Council’s, Women, Peace and Security, policy agenda.

But while highly effective in drawing attention to wartime sexual violence and building support to prevent it, the mainstream narrative rests on a set of assumptions that are partial, misleading, and sometimes flat wrong. Some of the assumptions also have unfortunate implications for policy.

Chapter 1 examines some of the misunderstandings that underpin the mainstream narrative on sexual violence in wartime. It argues that this narrative is biased in two important ways.

First, it tends to treat the sexual violence perpetrated in the worst affected countries as if it were typical of all conflict-affected countries. In fact, in the majority of countries in conflict the reported levels of sexual violence are far less than the mainstream narrative suggests. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the level of sexual violence worldwide is likely declining, not increasing as claimed by senior UN officials.

Second, the mainstream narrative systematically neglects domestic sexual violence in war-affected countries, even though it is far more pervasive than the conflict-related sexual violence that is perpetrated by rebels, militias, and government forces, and which receives the overwhelming majority of media and official attention.

Chapter 2 examines the incentive structures that drive not only media reporting of wartime sexual violence but also the analysis and policies of the UN and other international agencies, as well as major NGOs. It argues that these incentive structures have created a one-sided narrative that distorts our understanding of sexual violence in war-affected countries and severely hinders the widely endorsed goal of creating policies that are “evidence-based.”

---

**In the majority of conflict countries, reported levels of sexual violence are far lower than the mainstream narrative suggests.**

---

Chapter 3 focuses on the impact of wartime sexual violence on children. Here the data are so bad that few conclusions can be drawn with confidence. But the limited data that do exist suggest that in the large majority of cases, sexual violence against children in wartime is perpetrated by family members and acquaintances—not strangers or combatants. The prevalence of sexual violence directed against children also

appears to be significantly lower than among adults. Children seem to be partially protected from sexual violence simply because they are children.

Chapter 4 examines the impact of war on education. Here there is a wealth of reasonably robust data on educational enrolments and attainments around the world. Most official and NGO reporting on the impact of war on educational systems does, however, not rely on the cross-national statistical trend data, but rather on detailed descriptions of the effects of war on enrolments or attainments in individual countries. These descriptions are often complemented

by selected single-country statistics—on the number of schools destroyed during conflict, for example, but rarely provide a globally representative picture.

The overall assessments that are drawn from these country case studies provide rich contextualized pictures of the impact of war on educational outcomes. But they are subject to selection bias—that is, they draw information disproportionately from the worst affected countries that are—understandably—the focus of most media and political attention. The mainstream narrative tends to treat the impact of war on the worst affected countries as if it were representative of all countries in conflict. It is not.

Data from multi-country studies and some econometric analyses reveal a quite different story. Here the evidence indicates that during many conflict periods, educational outcomes—counterintuitively—improve on average.

---

**Part II finds that civil wars with external military intervention are twice as deadly as civil wars in which there is no external military intervention.**

---

Part II of the Report updates the trend data on organized violence published in previous Reports and Human Security Briefs and examines the topical issue of persistent conflicts where it finds fewer causes for concern than do other analysts.

Perhaps the most encouraging finding is that peace agreements save lives even when the violence recurs. In fact, the data show that annual battle-death tolls in conflicts that restart

after peace agreements have broken down drop by 80 percent. This represents a greater reduction in death tolls than for any other type of conflict termination.

Part II also finds that civil wars that are internationalized are twice as deadly as those in which there is no military intervention by an outside power.

We furthermore investigate trends in other types of organized violence and find that *non-state armed conflicts*—those that do not involve a state as one of the warring parties—have not been increasing as some have claimed. What is more, we find that the number of campaigns of deadly violence against defenceless civilians was lower in 2009 than at any time since 1989.

## **War and Sexual Violence: Myths and Realities**

The advocacy of the UN, other international agencies, and major humanitarian and human rights NGOs on behalf of the victims of wartime sexual violence has made a major contribution to raising public awareness about the horrific nature of sexual violence in today's conflict zones and in bringing pressure to bear to implement policies to combat it.

But the lack of reliable and accessible cross-national data on sexual violence in wartime remains a major factor limiting our understanding of its scope and intensity. And, absent robust data to enable reality checks, a series of myths about wartime sexual violence has flourished, largely unchallenged. The mainstream narrative that results is partial, misleading, and has negative implications for policy.

### *A Misleading Global Narrative*

Chapter 1 of the Report argues that the mainstream narrative on wartime sexual violence is based in part on mistaken assumptions that have perpetuated a number of misunderstandings about sexual violence in wartime. We present five challenges to this narrative:

- *Conflicts with Extreme Sexual Violence Are the Exception Rather Than the Rule*

In the absence of reliable cross-national survey data, accounts of wartime sexual violence tend to draw heavily on data from the worst affected countries, buttressed by shocking victim narratives, unsupported generalizations, and statistical “urban myths.” The impression created is that the extreme sexual violence suffered in a relatively small number of war-affected countries is the norm. But recent research has revealed that in more than half of the years in which countries are in conflict, levels of reported conflict-related sexual violence are low to negligible. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Sudan (Darfur), Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Bosnia—the countries that have received most media and advocacy attention—are the exceptions, not the rule.

- *Claims That Sexual Violence in Wartime Is Increasing Are Not Based on Evidence*

There is no doubt that the *reporting* of conflict-related sexual violence in war zones has increased dramatically over the past two decades as the political salience of the issue has increased. But there is no compelling evidence to support assertions made by senior UN officials and in high-level UN and other official reports, that wartime sexual violence has been increasing.

Moreover, although there are no reliable cross-national trend data on sexual violence in wartime, *indirect* evidence suggests that its incidence has *declined* worldwide over the past two decades. It is likely that conflict-related sexual violence decreased along with the decline in the number and deadliness of armed conflicts. The *Report* assumes that when conflicts end, conflict-related sexual violence generally also stops, or at the very least declines appreciably.<sup>2</sup>

- *Strategic Rape Is Less Common Than Claimed*

The mainstream narrative claims that *strategic rape*—the use of rape as a weapon of war—is a pervasive and a growing threat. While there are certainly cases where rape has been deliberately used as a weapon of war, no credible evidence has been produced to support claims that strategic rape is pervasive in most conflicts, nor that its incidence has been growing. It is certainly true that *reporting* of strategic rape has increased, but this is not the same as an actual increase.

- *The Most Prevalent Form of Sexual Violence in Wartime Is Ignored*

The mainstream narrative on sexual violence in wartime focuses one-sidedly on sexual violence perpetrated by rebels, militias, and government forces and ignores almost completely *domestic sexual violence*—that perpetrated by intimate partners, relatives, and acquaintances. Yet, the latter claims far more victims in war-affected countries than does conflict-related sexual violence. This narrow focus has greatly limited our comprehension of the extent of sexual violence in war-affected countries, while high-level political

attention and humanitarian assistance has been directed primarily at the survivors of conflict-related rape.

■ *Male Victims and Female Perpetrators*

It is clear that men make up the majority of perpetrators of wartime sexual violence and women and girls comprise the overwhelming majority of its victims. But many males are also victimized by sexual violence in wartime, and some females are perpetrators. Indeed, recent survey data indicate that both male victims and female perpetrators may be far more numerous than generally believed. Yet, both are largely ignored in the mainstream narrative.

We do not, of course, dispute the fact that sexual violence in today's armed conflicts can cause immense suffering. But media reporting too often portrays wartime sexual violence in the worst affected countries in a way that suggests that the extreme abuses that generate news headlines are the norm. They are not—not even in the worst affected countries.

Consider the case of Liberia, a country notorious for the gross levels of wartime sexual violence perpetrated in the civil wars of the 1990s and early 2000s. Indeed, one much-cited *New York Times* article in 2009 claimed that three out of every four women in Liberia had been raped during these wars.

That appalling sexual atrocities were committed in Liberia's wars is indisputable, but while the media horror stories were mostly true, they were not the whole truth. The best nationwide data on sexual violence in wartime Liberia reveal a very different, but largely unreported, story.

In 2007 a nationwide population survey undertaken by the Demographic and Health Survey found that the lifetime prevalence rate of sexual violence for females aged 15 to 49 in war-affected Liberia was 18 percent. This is very high, but only a small fraction of the three out of four women in Liberia that the *New York Times* alleged were raped during the fighting. (We examine this much-cited, but quite wrong, assertion in detail in Chapter 1.)

---

Media reporting often portrays wartime sexual violence in a way that suggests the extreme abuses that generate news headlines are the norm.

---

To put the lifetime prevalence rate in Liberia in perspective, consider the situation in the United States. According to a major survey undertaken in 2010 for the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the lifetime prevalence rate of sexual violence in the US is some 18 percent—the same rate as in Liberia.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Incentives That Drive the Mainstream Narrative on Wartime Sexual Violence**

Chapter 2 of the *Report* argues that the biases evident in the mainstream narrative on wartime sexual violence are determined in large part by the incentive structures that underpin both media coverage of today's wars and the work of international humanitarian and human rights agencies and NGOs, whose mission includes advocacy as well as service delivery.

Media reporting on wartime sexual violence is driven in large part by the “if it bleeds it leads” news imperative. Violence is news. Hence, the media focus on horrific victim narratives of conflict-related sexual violence—stories of mass rapes, mutilations, shocking sexual assaults on young children, etc.

The domestic sexual violence that takes place behind closed doors in war-affected countries—much of which is not even illegal in the countries where it happens—is ignored by the media almost completely. And domestic sexual violence in wartime is notably absent from the Security Council’s high-profile wartime sexual violence agenda—despite the fact that it is far more pervasive than conflict-related sexual violence.

The strong media bias towards covering countries worst affected by wartime rape also ensures that news that is far less bad receives minimal coverage. As pointed out, a majority of war-affected countries have low to negligible levels of reported sexual violence.

The incentives that partially drive the official and NGO narratives on sexual violence in war-affected countries are rather different, but they have a similar effect. Here the critical issue is that the demand for humanitarian assistance in these countries, including for the survivors of sexual violence, invariably exceeds the resources available to meet it.

This has created a dilemma for donors, service providers, and advocates, one that lies at the very heart of the humanitarian enterprise. As Ian Smillie and Larry Minear put it:

In a highly competitive environment—made competitive by great needs and inadequate funding—exaggeration not only pays, it is sometimes the only thing that will dislodge funding from donors who themselves have too few resources and too many supplicants.

With funding rarely sufficient to meet humanitarian needs, UN agencies and NGOs have a clear interest in disseminating information that will highlight the dire plight of those in need and attract the media coverage that helps persuade public and private donors into opening their wallets.

These complementary media and advocacy incentives explain in large part why the mainstream narrative on sexual violence in wartime is both partial and misleading.

### *Policy Implications*

Few doubt that the provision of humanitarian assistance for the victims of sexual violence in wartime is often inadequate. Given this, why should it matter if NGOs and international agencies overstate the scope and intensity of conflict-related sexual violence in order to access adequate levels of humanitarian funding for the survivors of that violence? The beneficiaries will surely not complain.

The short answer is that without data, there can be no evidence-based policy. Without reliable data for needs assessments, for example, the effective and equitable allocation of humanitarian assistance to rape survivors becomes impossible. Without reliable data, policy-makers cannot know whether sexual violence in war-affected countries is increasing or

decreasing. And, absent this most basic information, they can have little idea whether policies directed at deterring or stopping sexual violence are having any effect.

But these are only the most obvious challenges. Consider some of the negative policy responses that may result from the sources of bias in the mainstream narrative noted previously and the ensuing urban myths.

---

Of the more than 4,000 NGOs that address the issue of wartime sexual violence, only 3 percent mentioned males in their informational materials.

---

First, the fact that many war-affected countries experience low or negligible levels of reported sexual violence has generated almost no interest in the policy community. And with a handful of important exceptions, it has received very little attention in the research community either. Yet, understanding why some countries suffer much lower rates of sexual violence than others could provide important insights for improving sexual violence prevention programs.

Second, as long as policy-makers in the UN and elsewhere erroneously believe that wartime sexual violence is increasing worldwide, they will have few incentives to seek to understand why it might be *decreasing*. In fact, the indirect evidence suggests that conflict-related sexual violence is declining. Since the end of the Cold War, the number and deadliness of armed conflicts has decreased substantially, and with it—we assume—the incidence of conflict-related sexual violence.

The decline in conflict numbers has been driven in part by the success of *peacemaking* initiatives—using diplomatic means to stop ongoing conflicts. Since there is considerable evidence that peacemaking is effective, the *Report* suggests that it may constitute a more viable indirect strategy for reducing conflict-related rape than the UN’s direct prevention efforts for which there is little evidence of success.

Third, the omission of male victims from the mainstream narrative on wartime sexual violence—and from most official and NGO reports—has clear and inequitable policy consequences, the most obvious being that the needs of male survivors of wartime rape are largely ignored. The extent of this neglect is remarkable. One recent study found that of the more than 4,000 NGOs around the world that address the issue of wartime sexual violence, only 3 percent even *mentioned* males in their informational materials.

Finally, the mainstream narrative’s one-sided focus on conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by rebels, militias, and government troops has meant that the more pervasive threats that domestic sexual violence pose to the rights and integrity of women in wartime have been rendered largely invisible, not least on the agenda of the UN Security Council.

Moreover, the policy prescriptions being pursued by the UN in seeking to prevent conflict-related sexual violence have virtually no relevance for the more pervasive threat of domestic sexual violence in wartime. And because domestic sexual violence in war-affected countries is a continuation of the largely invisible domestic sexual violence that persists in peacetime, it

does not constitute an “emergency” issue. As a consequence, its survivors, unlike the victims of conflict-related sexual violence, rarely receive humanitarian assistance.

### Children and Wartime Sexual Violence

Chapter 3 of this *Report* addresses sexual violence against children in wartime. Yet, the fragmentary and unreliable nature of the data means that determining how, and to what true extent, children in conflict-affected countries are affected by wartime sexual violence is currently impossible.

The best data we have on the prevalence of sexual violence in poor countries comes from nationwide population surveys. But the few such surveys that are undertaken in wartime mostly ignore children, while the surveys that do ask questions about children’s experience of sexual violence are mostly undertaken in peacetime.

The UN’s Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) collects data on a range of human rights violations against children in armed conflict, including sexual violence. But, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, the methodology of the MRM grossly underestimates the prevalence of sexual violence against children in conflict-affected countries—although it is useful in many other ways.

---

Estimates of wartime sexual violence against children based on face-to-face interviews rather than anonymous responses are likely too low.

---

Without referring to its own inadequate MRM data, the UN has claimed that wartime violence against children—including sexual violence—is *increasing*. There is *no* evidence to support such an assertion. Indeed, as with adults, the worldwide incidence of sexual violence against children perpetrated by combatants has likely decreased as the number and deadliness of wars have declined.

The very limited evidence that we have suggests that the patterns of sexual violence against children in wartime are very similar to those against adults. In both cases, the large majority of sexual violence is *domestic* in origin—perpetrated by family members or close acquaintances, not by rebels, militias, or government troops. In both cases, sexual violence rates vary substantially from region to region and country to country.

The evidence also suggests that estimates of the prevalence of wartime sexual violence against children that are based solely on face-to-face interviews rather than anonymous responses are likely too low. This was demonstrated in the World Health Organization’s multi-country surveys in the early 2000s. Women respondents were asked, both directly and anonymously, if they had been sexually violated as children. The anonymous responses indicated substantially higher rates of assault than the face-to-face responses. It is likely that similar degrees of under-reporting characterize survey-based estimates of sexual violence against adults, although this possibility has not been tested cross-nationally.

The one clear difference between children and adults with respect to sexual violence—in both war-affected countries and those at peace—is that children, especially young children, suffer lower levels of victimization than adults. This suggests that they receive a degree of normative protection simply because they are children.

### *Bridging the Knowledge Gaps*

The absence of reliable cross-national data on the extent and severity of sexual violence against children, as well as adults, means that the aspirations of donor governments and international agencies for policy in this area to be evidence-based cannot be realized.

In poor countries where most wars take place, only well-run nationwide population surveys can generate reliable data that are robust enough to determine whether wartime sexual violence is increasing or decreasing—and to inform policy formulation, needs assessment, and impact evaluation.

### **The Impact of War on Children’s Education**

Chapter 4 examines the impact of war on education. Here access to reliable information is far better than is the case with wartime sexual violence. This is in large part because a major international effort has gone into collecting and collating cross-national educational data for Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDG target for education calls for all children to have the opportunity to complete primary school by 2015.

Mainstream accounts of the effect of war on educational outcomes, however, rarely draw on these cross-national statistical data. They typically review narrative descriptions, including disturbing victim accounts, of how particular impacts of war—the destruction of schools, or the rape of schoolchildren, for example—affect the educational system. Not surprisingly, these accounts tend to draw on findings from countries where the impact of armed violence has been substantial and where the need for assistance is greatest.

The mainstream narrative sometimes draws on sophisticated statistical analyses from *individual* countries—many of them undertaken by the Households in Conflict Network—on the impact of conflict on national educational systems. But findings from these studies, while valuable, are unlikely to be a reliable guide to the impact of war on educational systems *in general* because they tend to focus on countries most affected by conflict.

Taken together, these accounts paint a bleak picture. Indeed, reports from UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), the World Bank, and major NGOs have described the impact of conflict on education as “devastating,” “disastrous,” and destroying educational opportunities on an “epic scale.”

But, as Chapter 4 points out, descriptive statistics from two major multi-country studies—one by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the other by the Education Policy and Data Center—make it clear that these are not accurate descriptions of the impact of warfare on education in most conflict-affected countries. The mainstream narrative draws inappropriate general conclusions from a limited number of unrepresentative case studies.

Data from the multi-country background study by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics for UNESCO's flagship 2011 *Global Monitoring Report* reveals, for example, that in only 11 percent of conflict periods was there a clear decline in educational attainment indicators. In more than 40 percent of cases, however, attainment indicators at the end of a conflict period were *higher* than at the beginning—sometimes even in the areas worst affected by warfare. Data from another multi-country study, undertaken by the Washington-based Education Policy and Data Center in 2010, also show that educational outcomes improved in a surprising number of cases in areas that were worst affected by conflict.

The most remarkable finding, however, came from a major econometric study undertaken by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) for the World Bank's 2011 *World Development Report* that revealed that, on average, there was "no discernible effect of conflict on education levels."<sup>4</sup> This finding stands in stark contrast to the assumptions of the mainstream narrative on the impact of conflict on educational outcomes.

---

In low-intensity conflicts, the violence tends to be concentrated in small geographical areas, with most areas of the country not being directly affected.

---

The PRIO study also indicated that the average country in conflict improved its educational outcomes at approximately the same rate as the average nonconflict country—though from a lower baseline. If both conflict and nonconflict countries improve their educational outcomes at the same rate, this suggests that conflict has, on average, little net impact.

How can such deeply counterintuitive findings be explained? First, in many cases the impact of conflict on the educational system is simply too small to have a discernible *nationwide* effect on this rate of improvement. The average conflict in the new millennium has experienced fewer than 1,000 reported battle deaths a year. This means that the annual death toll from armed conflict in a given country is usually far smaller than the number of homicides. We do not expect countries that have 1,000-plus homicides a year to have poor educational outcomes as a consequence.

And low war death tolls are likely to be associated with low levels of societal disruption and physical destruction. Moreover, in low-intensity conflicts the violence tends to be concentrated in relatively small geographical areas—with most areas of the country not being directly affected by the fighting.

Second, the negative effect of conflict on educational systems may manifest itself in a *slowing* of the pre-war rate of improvement, rather than a complete halt or reversal.

Third, armed conflict may cause educational outcomes to deteriorate briefly, so briefly that it will not be picked up by the data. Again, this would indicate the robustness of the positive long-term trends.

Fourth, rising educational outcomes in war do not *necessarily* mean that the disruptions and destruction of warfare have no effect. A negative effect may be present, but not discernible,

in the outcome trend data because it is offset by other factors that *improve* outcomes. If average incomes rise during wartime, which happens in a surprising number of cases, the positive impact of this change on educational outcomes may outweigh the negative impact of the conflict.

In other cases, international assistance can boost school attendance even in periods of conflict. In Afghanistan, for example, fewer than a million children went to school under the Taliban. Since the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, a new government and massive inflows of foreign assistance have meant that more than six million children are now going to school, despite the ongoing political violence.<sup>5</sup>

In both these examples, educational outcomes improve despite the negative impact of conflict.

In other words, the statistical data on educational outcomes in conflict-affected countries do *not* support claims that war is “development in reverse,” to use Paul Collier’s memorable phrase. The impact of conflict on educational outcomes nationwide rarely causes them to decline absolutely. Where there is a discernible effect, it usually involves a reduction in the rate at which outcomes improve.

This means that educational systems in war-affected poor countries appear to be considerably more resilient than is generally assumed. But this fact tends to go unnoticed because the mainstream narrative, which draws primarily on case-study research, is heavily influenced by what happens in the worst affected countries. The data from the multi-country and econometric studies drawn on in this *Report*, which reveal a much less bleak picture of what happens to educational systems in wartime, are relatively recent, not easily accessible to nonspecialists, and remain largely unknown.

This is not all. There is a clear *association* between periods of conflict and low educational attainments—i.e., in conflict countries these outcomes are consistently lower than in nonconflict countries. But it is far from obvious that it is the conflict that *causes* the lower outcomes.

The mainstream narrative draws attention to the reality that educational outcomes in war-affected countries are consistently lower than those in nonconflict countries, and assumes—plausibly enough—that it is the conflict that causes the difference. But the cross-national data suggest that this is not the case.

Chapter 4 reviews a series of case studies by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics that indicate that in a majority of cases the low educational outcomes that exist during periods of conflict were also present in the pre-conflict period. This suggests that the low educational outcomes in the conflict period are not primarily caused by the conflict but by factors that preceded it.

Even during periods of warfare there are plausible explanations for poor educational outcomes, other than the deaths, disruption, and destruction caused by the war itself. The background study undertaken for the World Bank’s 2011 *World Development Report* by PRIO researchers found that state fragility—the weakness of institutions, governance, and state capacity in a given country—is more strongly associated with poor educational attainments than is conflict.<sup>6</sup>

There is a clear policy message here, namely that the most effective path to improving educational outcomes in wartime may be to reduce state fragility in peacetime.

Understanding state fragility in peacetime may help explain why educational outcomes in countries during wartime are lower than those in nonconflict countries. But is this explanation compatible with the fact that educational outcomes *improve*, on average, in wartime?

A complete answer to this question is beyond the scope of this *Report*. Here we simply note that, overall, states appear to have become less fragile over time. Indeed, the global level of fragility declined worldwide by some 20 percent between 1995 and 2010 according to the State Fragility Index.

If state fragility is an important part of the explanation for low educational outcomes, both in times of war and peace, we would expect that as fragility declines, then—other things being equal—overall educational attainments and other development indicators will improve. This is, in fact, what the data from the PRIO and other studies suggest.

### Trends in Human Insecurity

Part II of the *Report* examines changes in the incidence and severity of organized violence around the world and finds little change in the post-Cold War trend towards fewer and less deadly wars reported in previous *Human Security Reports*.

Chapter 5 shows that the deadliness of warfare has declined over the last 50 to 60 years, and there are now significantly fewer armed conflicts around the world than during the peak of the early 1990s. The average number of *high-intensity conflicts* per year—defined as conflicts that reach 1,000 or more battle deaths in a calendar year—dropped by half from the 1980s to the new millennium.

A new analysis of military intervention in civil wars finds that conflicts that involve the military forces of external powers are, on average, twice as deadly as civil wars in which there are no such interventions. Given that foreign military interventions introduce new combatants and weapons systems into countries in conflict, this is not surprising.

The fact that military interventions are associated with greatly increased battle-death numbers is not necessarily an argument against military intervention for humanitarian—or indeed other—purposes. But in considering the pros and cons of such interventions, it is clearly a factor that should be weighed in the decision-making process.

Chapter 6 of this *Report* presents the first systematic analysis of post-World War II trends in conflict persistence, which has received increasing attention from academics and policy-makers. *Persistence* has two related meanings here. The first refers to the length of wars, and the second to the rate at which they start again after having stopped. The average duration of conflicts appears to have increased. And the trend data indicate that, in recent years, conflicts that stopped were increasingly likely to recur within a relatively short period.

A closer examination of the data, however, reveals a more encouraging picture. Most of today's conflict episodes are relatively short and long-lasting conflicts are the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, persistent conflicts are often very small in scale. Finally, the rates of

conflict recurrence have increased in large part because conflicts have become more difficult to win—but not necessarily more difficult to resolve through peacemaking and peacebuilding.

It is true that the *average* length of conflicts has been increasing. This is in part because conflict numbers have been shrinking overall, while a number of intractable long-running conflicts have persisted. But it is not true that there is any tendency for *recent* conflicts to last a long time—most conflict episodes that have started during the last two decades have been short-lived and small in scale.

It is also a fact that in the new millennium, wars that end have been more likely to restart than in the past. This is not, however, because today's peace agreements are failing more frequently than those in the past.

Most of the conflicts that restart soon after they have stopped are very small. As the fighting in these small conflicts waxes and wanes from year to year, the death toll may change enough to cross the conflict threshold of 25 battle deaths

in a calendar year. Conflict may thus stop, only to start a couple of years later as the violence increases slightly. It is this in-and-out pattern of low-intensity conflicts that has been the major cause of the recent increase in conflict recurrences.

Because most of these recurring conflicts are small, and often geographically isolated, they almost never threaten governments and pose relatively few threats to citizens. As a result, there is no great incentive for governments to expend major resources in an effort to stop them.

Peace agreements have been highly prone to break down in the past, and some critics have argued in favour of “giving war a chance,” by pursuing victory on the battlefield rather than peace agreements at the bargaining table. The rationale here is that conflicts that end in victory are less likely to recur, and thus will save more lives in the long run than those that end in peace agreements.

The critics are wrong. Peace agreements today are more stable than is usually assumed. And conflicts that restart in the wake of peace agreements that break down still see a dramatic reduction—some 80 percent, on average—in annual battle-death tolls. Peace agreements, in other words, succeed in saving lives even when they “fail.”

The final chapters of this *Report* cover trends in those forms of organized violence that do not fit the traditional definition of conflict. Chapter 7 discusses new research on *non-state conflicts*—those that do not involve a government as one of the warring parties. It finds no evidence that these somewhat volatile and generally low-intensity struggles are becoming either more frequent or deadly, as some have claimed.

Similarly, Chapter 8 finds that the number of campaigns of *one-sided violence*—deadly attacks against defenceless civilians—was lower in 2009 than at any time since 1989, the first year for which data are available.

---

Conflicts that restart in the wake of collapsed peace agreements still see a reduction in annual battle-death tolls of more than 80 percent.

---

## PART I

# ENDNOTES

## OVERVIEW

- 1 References for all statistics and quotations in the Overview are found in the main body of the *Report* unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Note that while conflict-related sexual violence declines when wars end, it may take significantly longer to stop completely.
- 3 For women aged 18 and above, the CDC found the rate for women was 18.3 percent—meaning that nearly one in five women had been victimized by sexual violence in their lifetimes. See Michele Black et al., *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report* (Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011), 18, [http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS\\_Report2010-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_Report2010-a.pdf) (accessed 3 September 2012).
- 4 Scott Gates et al., “Development Consequences of Armed Conflict,” *World Development* 40, no. 9 (2012): 1713–1722, 1718, doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.04.031 (accessed 2 September 2012).
- 5 Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), “The Difficulty and Perils of Education in Afghanistan,” [http://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/focus\\_on/afghanistan/afghanistan\\_3.html](http://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/focus_on/afghanistan/afghanistan_3.html) (accessed 3 September 2012).
- 6 The particular measure of fragility that the PRIO researchers used did not, as do others, include conflict as one of its elements.

## CHAPTER 1

- 7 Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts’ Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women’s Role in Peace Building* (New York: UNIFEM, 2002), 9, <http://www.ucm.es/cont/descargas/documento7201.pdf> (accessed 8 June 2012).
- 8 For a detailed description of the “narrative” concept, see Severine Autesserre, “Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and Their Unintended Consequences,” *African Affairs* (2012): 6–9, doi: 10.1093/afraf/adr080 (accessed 8 June 2012).
- 9 Anne M. Goetz, “Introduction” (presented at the Wilton Park Conference, *Women Targeted or Affected by Armed Conflict: What Role for Military Peacekeepers?*, Sussex, UK, 27 May 2008), 1, [http://www.unifem.org/attachments/events/WiltonParkConference\\_Presentations\\_200805.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/attachments/events/WiltonParkConference_Presentations_200805.pdf) (accessed 29 January 2012).
- 10 Wood’s definition is based on that used by the International Criminal Court, see Elisabeth J. Wood, “Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When Is Wartime Rape Rare?” *Politics & Society* 37, no. 1 (2009): 5, doi: 10.1177/0032329208329755 (accessed 8 June 2012).
- 11 We do not include female genital cutting under this rubric since its motivation is very different.