

Welcome to the UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action) Network's sixth newsletter, showcasing some of our current initiatives, highlights from 2023 and goals for 2024 in the global response to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). UN Action is a Network of 25 UN entities united with the goal of ending sexual violence during and in the wake of armed conflict. Guided by the Network's 2020 - 2025 Strategic Framework, 2023 continued to be filled with initiatives to further a survivor-centred approach, ensure prevention of CRSV, and enhance justice and accountability for survivors.

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KEY REPORT: UN ACTION'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023

Throughout 2023, UN Action continued to engage in conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) programming, advocacy, knowledge building, and resource mobilisation as the Network neared the completion of its two-year Workplan ending in 2023. The Network continued to grow with the addition of two new member entities: the International Labour Organisations (ILO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to help advance workstreams related to economic empowerment and food insecurity, respectively.

In 2023, UN Action hosted one Steering Committee meeting and 12 technical-level coordination meetings. Network Focal Points were grateful to be specially briefed by country colleagues on the situations in Libya, Iraq, Ukraine, the DRC and Sudan (twice) to inform how the Network could support country offices in responding to situations of CRSV. As a result, the Network published a [press statement](#) urging immediate action to protect women and girls in and around internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in eastern DRC, and held a [roundtable discussion](#) on the margins of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) that focuses on arms control and disarmament using Sudan as a case study.

To strengthen its role as a knowledge hub on CRSV, nine UN Action member entities gave presentations on how they are addressing and mainstreaming the CRSV mandate in their work. The Network also progressed work on furthering the understanding of what it means to adopt a survivor-centred approach, the implementation of the [Prevention Framework](#), the next phase of the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (the MARA), the revitalisation of the Stop Rape Now campaign, capacity building trainings on the foundations of CRSV, and exploring how to provide mental health support to CRSV survivors. In March 2023, UN Action hosted a brownbag webinar on taking a survivor-centred approach in the pursuit of transitional justice.

From a programmatic point of view, UN Action was able to continue a project in the DRC that provided health services and economic support to survivors of CRSV, many of whom draw their livelihoods from the mining industry. UN Action also began implementing a project in Mali which directly supported over 65,000 beneficiaries through awareness raising activities and the provision of multisectoral and socioeconomic reintegration assistance to survivors, children born of rape, and their communities. Implementation also started of UN Action's joint catalytic project in Ukraine that will allow for mutually reinforcing efforts to prevent CRSV and empower survivors.

On the advocacy front, UN Action's exhibition at HQ in New York, "A CRSV Survivor's Journey", brought in over 50,000 visitors. The exhibition, launched during an event on the margins of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence (19 June) which was attended by over 120 participants, showcased the gravity of CRSV as an urgent threat to international peace and security through an array of photos, videos, text and interactive elements. UN Action was also present at the EU Humanitarian Forum and the 53rd Session of the Human Rights Council to further promote the Network.

We look forward to the development of our final two-year Workplan in 2024, which will be co-created at a Network-wide Strategic Retreat in February, to conclude [UN Action's 2020 to 2025 Strategic Framework](#).



CRSV survivors, veiled for their protection, were legally assisted by local partners as beneficiaries of UN Action's project in the DRC | Photo by Saidi Abasi Madjid



Special Representative Patten guiding Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed around the exhibition

UN ACTION MEMBER PROFILE: UNODA



The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) is a UN Secretariat entity working to regulate weapons and combat illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. UNODA joined the Network in 2019 to strengthen synergies between gender and arms control, and to integrate CRSV aspects into weapons discussions.

As articulated in the [Prevention Framework](#), the role of arms control and disarmament is critical for CRSV prevention as weapons are used directly and indirectly to commit CRSV – directly insofar as weapons are used to threat, commit CRSV, injure, and kill, and indirectly as weapons fuel armed conflict. The proliferation of illicit arms and ammunition are known risk factors and root causes of CRSV, while excessive military spending could impact funding for other security measures, such as CRSV prevention. To better understand this nexus, in December 2023, UN Action and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) co-hosted an online event, moderated by UNODA, on weapons proliferation in relation to escalating levels of sexual violence with a particular spotlight on Sudan. UN Action members from UNODC working on firearms trafficking and gender also spoke at the event.

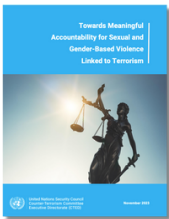
UNODA’s engagement with UN Action primarily aims to identify entry points to integrate arms control as a practical measure for strengthening CRSV advocacy and prevention efforts. For example, UNODA promotes CRSV in the context of international weapons instruments and leverages its partnerships with UNIDIR, civil society and other actors in contexts. By way of example, in Haiti, UNODA’s regional centre for the Latin America and Caribbean (UNLIREC) integrates CRSV as part of its support to the development of the National Action Plan under the framework of the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap to address the illicit flow of weapons and ammunition. Additionally, UNODA holds trainings and supports Governments, including those of CAR, DRC, and Mali, to mainstream gender into small arms policies and programmes, and developed a [Training Manual on Gender-Mainstreaming Small Arms Control](#), which includes a CRSV section.

In 2024, UNODA looks forward to exploring means to increase data collection and analysis on the use of small weapons in CRSV, continuing coordination with those working on CRSV and small arms and light weapons, and supporting States to bring CRSV consideration into the international conference, the Fourth Review Conference of the Programme of Action on Small Arms, in New York in June.

2023 CRSV-RELATED RESOURCES FROM UN ACTION ENTITIES



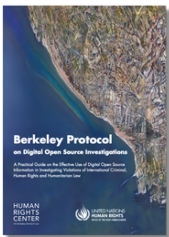
UNFPA’s *The Missing Peace Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*



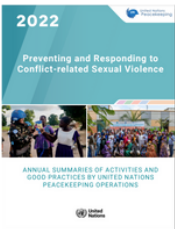
CTED’s *Towards Meaningful Accountability for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Linked to Terrorism*



UN Women’s *Progress on the SDGs – The Gender Snapshot 2023*



OHCHR’s *Berkley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations*



DPO’s *2022 Annual Summary of Activities on Preventing and Responding to CRSV*



UNODA’s *Gender-Mainstreaming Small Arms Control Training Course*

EVENT IN FOCUS: ADDRESSING WEAPONS IN CRSV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE - THE CASE OF SUDAN

On 6 December 2023, UN Action held a roundtable discussion in collaboration with UNIDIR on the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism against GBV. It addressed the nexus between CRSV, arms control and disarmament by exploring the humanitarian situation and conflict in Sudan.

The event started with a welcome from Lindsay Forslund, UN Action’s Deputy Coordinator, and was moderated by Frida Thomassen, UNODA. Several notable speakers shed light on arms control as a means for CRSV prevention. For instance, Hana Salama, UNIDIR, presented her report that was published in 2023, Addressing Weapons in Conflict-related Sexual Violence: The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox. The report addressed themes raised in the Secretary-General’s 2022 annual report on CRSV, which indicated that ‘the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is one of the factors fuelling systematic and widespread CRSV’ and provided a backdrop for the roundtable discussion. The presentation illustrated some interesting conclusions and recommendations, including the need to disaggregate data by weapon to better inform CRSV prevention efforts and to use the MARA Working Group in-country to collect information on weapon trends and analysis. Max Menn, UNODC, complemented the UNIDIR findings by raising the importance of implementing policies to prevent access to firearms and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. He echoed the importance of disaggregated firearm data by age and gender in order to have a greater understanding of the issue. Not doing so could act as a hindrance to comprehensive response in conflict and non-conflict settings.

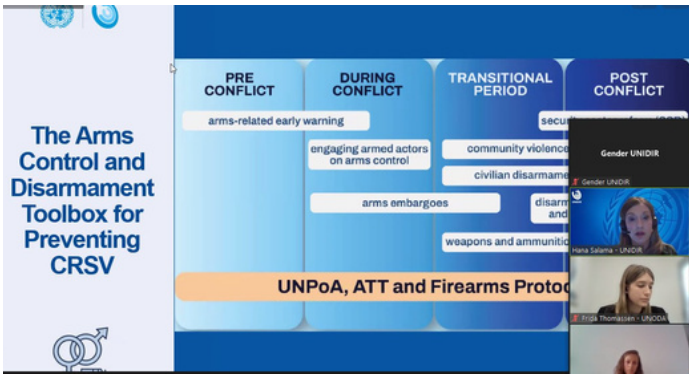


Photo courtesy of UNIDIR’s Twitter



The roundtable discussion featured valuable insights from two Sudanese activists. Sulaima Ishaq, the General Director of Sudan’s Unit for Combatting Violence Against Women, detailed the adverse impact of armed conflict on Sudanese women, including CRSV in the form of sexual slavery, kidnapping and forced marriage. She elaborated that survivors are reporting that weapons are playing a pivotal role in the perpetration of CRSV, particularly in their use to threaten and harm victims. Mayada Adil, a Sudanese Youth Activist, called for greater inclusion of youth, particularly women and youth advocacy groups, in peacebuilding efforts and decision-making processes. She also urged for a mechanism to support all youth activists and CRSV survivors, especially as many survivors have called for the continuation of their education, provision of psychological support, and group therapy. Sven Pfeiffer, UNODC, added that its study in Sudan with the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict (TOE) focused on the criminal justice systems’ response to CRSV. The findings highlighted the need for institutional reform, trainings and survivor support systems.

Anna-Lena Schluchter, the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, also provided opening remarks noting that these events were commendable for reinforcing the synergies between sometimes siloed experts/entities and relayed that Switzerland has committed to mainstreaming the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and CRSV in the Security Council as a non-permanent member from 2023 to 2024.

Over 50 participants from 15 countries attended the virtual roundtable, ranging from UN Action Network members, Women Protection Advisers, CRSV/WPS experts, civil society representatives, practitioners and Member States. It was a meaningful event that illustrated the holistic contributions of the UN Action Network, working across thematic areas to tackle root causes of CRSV. You can find a full recording of the event [here](#).

COORDINATION HIGHLIGHT: TECHNICAL SUPPORT IN MALI

On 30 June 2023, the UN Security Council issued [resolution 2690](#) which called for the withdrawal of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) by 31 December 2023 in line with the Malian Government's request. As such, UN Action has been supporting colleagues in Mali to ensure the continued provision of services to CRSV survivors, as well as a coordinated transition of all CRSV-related activities to remaining UN entities in-country.

One such critical activity that needed to be supported in the transition was the MARA. The purpose of the MARA is to ensure the systemic gathering of timely, accurate, reliable and objective information on CRSV, which is then used to promote increased and timely action in CRSV prevention and response. As the MARA mechanism in Myanmar differs from other countries, whereby there is no peacekeeping or political mission on the ground despite an agreement with the Government to address CRSV, UN Action facilitated a discussion between UNFPA Mali and UNFPA Myanmar to provide insight to the Mali team on what the MARA could look like without MINUSMA. Colleagues at UNFPA Myanmar shed light on challenges, promising practices and lessons learned in its implementation of the MARA in line with [UN Security Council resolution 1960](#). The timing of the MINUSMA transition also coincided with UN Action's project in Mali, originally being implemented by MINUSMA and UNFPA.

After the announcement of MINUSMA's withdrawal, UN Action has been working alongside UNFPA to identify risk reduction activities to mitigate obstacles during the transition in the Gao and Ménaka regions. As part of this, UNFPA has prepositioned supplies and established solid partnerships with local organisations to build their capacity and ensure quality holistic care services and protection of CRSV survivors and for at-risk groups in these areas. UN Action will continue to support its partners in-country through the duration of the project and beyond.

SPOTLIGHT: 2024 UPCOMING INITIATIVES

In 2024, UN Action aims to advance many of the activities started in 2023 and to begin new initiatives in the prevention and response to CRSV, including:



Implementation of the **Prevention Framework** in pilot countries of concern



Updating and finalisation of the Guidance Note on the Implementation of UNSCR 1960 to **advance the work of the MARA**



The completion of **UN Action's project in the DRC** by MONUSCO and OHCHR that has addressed the fight against impunity of CRSV, improved access to multisectoral assistance to survivors, and enhanced women's recognition and participation in their communities



Launch of a knowledge product to explore what it means to provide **mental health and psychosocial support** to survivors of CRSV



Continued co-implementation by UNFPA, UNODC, IOM, UNDP, WHO and UN Women of **UN Action's project in Ukraine** to address the rights and needs of CRSV survivors and strengthen the capacity of women-led and survivors' networks



Revitalisation of the **Stop Rape Now campaign**



Continued engagement to **bolster partnerships** with the private sector, academic institutions and NGOs to synchronise efforts to prevent CRSV and support survivors



Continued implementation by UNFPA of **UN Action's project in Mali** to ensure quality holistic care services (medical, psychosocial, and socio-economic reintegration) and protection of CRSV survivors and at-risk groups in Gao and Ménaka IDP camps



Launch of a guidance document on what it means to take a **survivor-centred approach to CRSV** with the intended use by all critical actors, including Governments, UN entities, service providers and humanitarian aid workers



Launch of **UN Action's project in South Sudan** focused on socio-economic empowerment of CRSV survivors to be co-implemented by ITC, UNFPA and UNMISS



Celebration of the **15th Anniversary** of [UNSCR 1888](#) and the creation of the SRSB-SVC mandate