

**International Women's Month  
Resilience in Conflict, War and Crimes Against Humanity by  
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During the observance of International Women's Month (IWM) 2023, it is a time dedicated to celebrating women and their significant contributions to society while also highlighting the challenges that are still faced worldwide.

The observance of IWM, brings greater attention to gender inequalities and the need for women's empowerment. In a sobering recent address to the United Nations (UN) by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres he highlighted, women's rights were "abused, threatened and violated," around the world. He further stated, at the current rate gender equality will not be achieved for at least 300 years given the current rate of change.

The UN has sounded the alarm that peace is severely under threat, more so than it has been since World War II. The world as we know it is facing the most pivotal moments in history and progress in women's rights has not been linear. United Nations, 2022 data indicate a quarter of the world's population or two billion people, currently live in conflict-affected areas. It is evident crimes against humanity reach unbearable levels when war begins. Violence becomes a daily occurrence while upholding women's rights hang in a delicate balance. The challenges women face today with the proliferation of global conflicts have resulted in downgrading women's rights.

Women and girls have been targeted during war, genocide and crimes against humanity for centuries and they continue to experience the worst in conflict. The assaults against women are deeply ingrained in egregious violations worldwide. During conflict women suffer violence, displacement, poverty, and discrimination. Women and girls are at high risk of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by military personnel, rebels, and other armed groups.

Rape as a weapon of war and conflict seeks to establish power, humiliate, and subsequently destroy parts of society. Additionally, women and girls may be forced to marry fighters, commanders, or other men in conflict zones. Women and girls are often abducted and sold into slavery or prostitution. They may be subjected to torture and mutilation, as a form of punishment, intimidation, or coercion. Women and girls often experience disproportionate rates of displacement as they leave their homes and communities behind resulting in economic insecurity, poverty, trauma, mental health issues, and poor health outcomes.

Globally addressing crimes against humanity, women's restricted roles, and a violation of their rights are not hard to identify. The world has witnessed Iran's morality police brutally enforced hijab laws on women. Russia and Turkey rolled back protections against domestic violence. The Taliban in Afghanistan are brutally snuffing out educational opportunities for women and girls, denying them the most basic freedoms. But in the face of repression, women's rights have become connected worldwide.

Women are standing firm against groups who use violence to weaponize their propaganda during war to harm women and girls. Iranian women have adopted the chant of the Kurdish women's movement, "Women, Freedom, Life!" In Indonesia and Afghanistan, women have also protested while standing in solidarity with Iranian women in sisterhood.

In Latin America the connection between democracy and women's rights is highlighted by green bandanas to protest femicide, police brutality and oppression in general. The Green Wave has been a battle cry in favor of human rights.

While in the Ukraine, 5.5 million refugees have already fled, and those internally displaced persons total 7.7 million. Of those who have fled it is estimated that 90 percent are women and children. Of these forced displaced women there is limited access to basic needs such as food, water, and healthcare. They may also experience psychological trauma, loss of family members or friends, and economic difficulties due to the destruction of infrastructure that precludes them for normal routines as they care for themselves, families, the dead and the dying.

Women in conflict and war may lose their traditional roles and status within their communities, leading to marginalization and discrimination. The UN has adopted global commitments like these Security Council resolution 1960 to address gender related violence in conflict, which provides an accountability system for sexual violence.

Resolution 1960 stipulates coordinated and timely collection of information on such violence; and calls for countries to establish specific time-bound commitments. As women are disproportionately affected by conflict and war, targeted support and protective measures are required.

Despite what is being witnessed in today's world, women have shown incredible resilience in increasingly difficult circumstances. Resilience and the ability to cope with adversity, continuing to function in the face of challenging situations has become the essence of women in war and conflict areas globally. Of note, women's resilience should not be romanticized or used to justify their suffering. Women should not be expected to simply endure the hardships of war. Women and girls should have access to protection, support, and resources that enable them to live in safety and dignity.

The UN Women's program specific to women, peace, and security support women's engagement in all aspects of peace building. Women are seen as bridge builders in resilience towards more inclusive, egalitarian societies that can end gender discrimination and resolve conflicts without violence. Empowering women to participate in the peace building processes can lead to a more sustainable, peaceful, and just society.

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