



## Conference Report

“GENDER-BASED MASS ATROCITY PREVENTION”

Pre-event of the 10<sup>th</sup> Budapest Centre Human Rights Forum

On 27 November 2017, the Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention, in collaboration with the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, has organized a roundtable entitled “Gender-based Mass Atrocities Prevention”, which has been held at the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The event was aimed at raising awareness on the abuses perpetrated against women and girls in times of conflict, and at exploring the way in which these human rights violations can be prevented to scale up to the level of mass atrocities.

The roundtable was organized as a pre-event to the 10<sup>th</sup> Budapest Human Rights Forum, which took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2017.

The audience was welcomed by Prof. József Zsengellér, Vice-Rector of the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, also on behalf of the Rector of the University, Péter Balla.

Welcoming remarks were offered by the Chair of the Budapest Centre, Dr. György Tatár, who stressed sexual violence in armed conflicts constitute one of the most serious abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It represents grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and their first Protocol. In cases of targeted attacks it can constitute a crime against humanity and even genocide. Sexual violence is not an obligatory appearance in armed conflicts therefore, the Budapest Centre believes there is wide scope for doing more and accomplishing more in preventing and prosecuting sexual violence through building institutions that enforce norms against rape, improving reporting mechanisms and building up national capabilities. The Budapest Centre plans to organize a follow up event in next February to offer space for international actors to present the working paper prepared by the team of the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect on sexual violations in Syria and discuss the ways to address the challenges in Syria from the perspective of sexual violence.

Afterwards, Mr. Andras Vamos-Goldman, the Executive Director of the Justice Rapid Response, delivered a keynote speech on the challenges to prevent gender-based violence. Recalling some of the most tragic and violent episodes of women rights’ violations, namely in Chad and Myanmar, and calling on the international community to finally reverse this worrying trend, he stressed the necessity to improve investigation and information gathering mechanisms in war-torn countries and

enable public authorities to intervene promptly and timely for prosecuting criminals. Moreover, he underlined that investigation practices must be grounded on professional and specific skills acquired by international experts.

The panel discussion was opened by, Ambassador Mr. István Lakatos, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary who highlighted some important aspects of the universalism versus cultural relativism debate. He underlined that the proponents of strict universality are of the view that the human rights guaranteed in international treaties and conventions should be applied in all countries based upon the equality, indivisibility and universality of all human rights while the advocates of cultural relativism argue that permitting international norms to override the dictates of culture and religion is a violation of state sovereignty. He pointed to the fact that the discussion is not about the denial of certain rights; it is more about the different implementation of human rights. He further presented the dilemma from the perspectives of women's rights and emphasized there are no quick fixes available for these culturally sensitive problems. There is a need for a constructive dialogue aimed at reaching gradual and sustainable solutions.

Soon after, the roundtable was joined by Cristina Stefan, Co-Director of the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect at Leeds University. Dr. Stefan provided an overview of the European and international framework concerning the Responsibility to Protect discourse. Making reference to the latest report of the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, she stressed the European Union is the only regional organization to have established an RtoP Focal Point so far. Moreover, through the lens offered by the principle of RtoP, the EU is also more effectively engaging in conflict prevention practices, by means of political dialogue facilitation. Lastly, she recalled that recent United Nations reviews on peace operations mainly focus on the prevention aspects of conflict management.

Mathias Möschel, Associate Professor at the Central European University presented the main international human rights instruments and standards on violence against women applicable to the European context, not necessarily linked to the context of war. He first outlined the instruments that, at the international level, have represented a milestone in the fight against human rights abuse, underlining the role that civil society organizations and female theorists have had in framing and conceptualizing violence against women as a specific form of discrimination. In particular, he mentioned the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the activities undertaken by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the last ten years and the 2011 Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence..

Afterwards, through the perspective of a civil society organization, Âurea Mouzinho, Co-Founder and Coordinator of the Ondjango Feminista organization, addressed the audience on the phenomenon concerning the sexual violence perpetrated against women in Angola.

Underlining that most of the statistics concerning mass atrocities are largely unreliable in Africa, she called for addressing sexual violence in the daily activities without waiting to “mass atrocities” in conflict situation. stressed, that women's body but in many cases male's body too are continuously victimized, both in periods of peace and conflict, and it is a global problem and responsibility and it need to address sexual violence “today” without waiting for the escalation of the conflict into mass atrocity situations.

In this respect, she mentioned the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, whose content has been described as revolutionary for what it enshrines in relation to women's rights.

On behalf of the country she represented, Angola, which is also a party of the Maputo Protocol, she emphasized the need for the international community including corporations to relentlessly and efficiently address sexual violence at global, conscious-raising and legislative levels to manage and investigate cases of violence against women.

Lastly, the floor was given to Thomas Peak, Junior Researcher at the Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention, who presented the preliminary results of a research prepared in cooperation with the Leeds University to explore the politicized dimension of sexual violence in war-torn country of Syria.

According to the control-collaboration model applied by the researchers, it is possible to provide a “rationalized explanation” for violence against civilians, which particularly arises from the “politicization” of private disputes and local rivalries. After having outlined the research design and its main findings, Mr. Peak has drawn the conclusion that the probability of increasing amount of sexual violence events is more likely in the zones where government control is stricter, while it decreases in those where there is no hegemony and the control is contested. The presentations have been ensued by a vivid question and answer session.