



News Release

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G8 commitment to tackle impunity for rape in conflict welcomed by human rights groups

London/Geneva, 12 April 2013 – A [Declaration](#) on Preventing Sexual Violence In Conflict was agreed yesterday by the G8 countries, declaring that rape and other serious sexual violence amount to war crimes and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions constitutes an emphatic reminder that states are required to investigate and prosecute conflict-related sexual violence wherever it occurs. Amnesty International UK, REDRESS and [TRIAL](#) welcomed the landmark Declaration but called on states to enact comprehensive laws that enable them to do so and to take steps to ensure the G8 Declaration results in more trials of alleged perpetrators.

Every state is obliged to exercise universal jurisdiction over “grave breaches” of the Geneva Conventions, defined as certain war crimes that occur in international armed conflict. The Declaration means that the G8 countries – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the US– now reaffirm and support the view that all states have an obligation to search for and prosecute (or hand over for trial) any individual alleged to have committed or ordered rape and other serious sexual violence regardless of the nationality of the suspect or victim or where the crime occurred, said the rights groups.

A milestone to end impunity for rape in war?

It has long been recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross and others that rape and other serious forms of sexual violence amount to grave breaches, but the G8 Declaration demonstrates that these countries now have the political will to act on their obligation to pursue alleged perpetrators.

“This Declaration is a major political milestone in the struggle to end impunity for rape in war,” said **Philip Grant**, [TRIAL Director](#). “But not enough states have opened their doors to prosecuting grave breaches wherever they occur despite what international law has long said. The human rights community will now be watching and waiting to see if governments follow through on the G8’s pledge by bringing their laws and practices into line with their international obligations.”

The rights groups hailed the Declaration as recognition by states that they have a shared responsibility to tackle impunity for sexual violence in conflict and that such crimes cannot be left only for international courts to address.

Lingering gaps

The Declaration only applies to sexual violence that occurs in international armed conflicts and amounts to torture, inhuman treatment or willfully causing great suffering but if states show real political will, it could pave the way for prosecution of alleged perpetrators of rape in international armed conflicts from the Balkans to the DRC by foreign courts, said the rights groups.

“This Declaration must not become yet another piece of paper. G8 states must use it as impetus to renew their commitment to ending impunity for sexual violence in conflict, whether committed in internal or international armed conflicts and whether against men, women or children. States must prosecute these crimes in their national courts or extradite suspects to face justice in another country exercising universal jurisdiction,” said **Kate Allen, Director of [Amnesty International UK](#)**. “In this way, the Declaration should galvanize efforts to ensure that there is truly no safe haven for alleged perpetrators of sexual violence crimes committed in armed conflict of all kinds.”

Holder of the G8 presidency, the UK proposed the move as part of its [Preventing Sexual violence in Conflict Initiative](#), a multi-million pound programme launched in May 2012 that also saw the formation of a UK team of experts that has provided technical assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and on the Syrian border to strengthen investigation and prosecution of sexual violence in conflict.

“This Declaration is a useful tool for the UK’s global initiative to combat sexual violence in armed conflict,” said **Dadimos Haile, Interim Director of [REDRESS](#)**. “Now the UK must fulfill its commitment by prosecuting suspected perpetrators of sexual violence amounting to international crimes – wherever they have been committed – who are present within its jurisdiction. Part of its obligation also includes ensuring victims’ access to adequate reparation.”

Amnesty International UK, REDRESS and TRIAL called on states to remove all obstacles to the investigation and prosecution of all crimes under international law, including sexual violence, noting that states should establish specialized units to handle such investigations and prosecutions in fair trials without the death penalty.

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