



# SURVIVING ON THEIR OWN

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF WAR, PEACE AND IMPUNITY



Asosiasun  
Chegal Ba Itai



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PEACE AND IMPUNITY**

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## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF WAR, PEACE AND IMPUNITY



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Title : Surviving on Their Own: Women's Experiences of War, Peace and Impunity  
First edition : November 2014  
Text by : Galuh Wandita, Nuela Labranche, Emily Harwell, Manuela Pereira, Sorang Saragih, Hkawng Seng Pan, Selviana Yolanda  
Photography : Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, and the research team  
Cover Photo : (Front) Women survivors in the fight against violence standing in front of the Jefferson building, a place where victims of the 1965 tragedy were tortured.  
Location : Yogyakarta.  
(Back) Women from Myanmar preparing for a discussion on truth and justice using the stone and flower method.  
Design : Ellena Ekarahendy, Serpico  
Book size : 18.5 x 26 cm  
ISBN : 978-602-14209-9-7

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Published in collaboration with the Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR)  
and the Associacaon Chega Ba Ita (ACBIT) Timor-Leste,  
Jaringan Perempuan Indonesia Timur (JPIT), Kiprah Perempuan (KIPPER),  
Lingkar Pemberdayaan Perempuan (LAPPAN), LBH Apik Aceh,  
Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi HAM (ELSHAM-Papua),  
Kachin Women Association Thailand (KWAT),  
Karen Women Empowerment Group (KWEG),  
and Women's Organizations Network of Myanmar (WON)

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# FOREWORD

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Despite concerted efforts to stop violence against women during conflict and proclaimed commitments to justice, women victims continue to struggle against discrimination and exclusion in their everyday lives.

This book of photos captures some of the initial results of a participatory action research in three Asian countries. As part of a learning collective, we facilitated in-depth discussions and exchanges with 140 women victims in Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Myanmar using participatory tools. We also used photos and videos to document this research.

AJAR would like to thank IDRC and the European Union for their contributions to this research, as well as members of the learning collective.

This book is dedicated to:

**Yohana Hermanus-Delu** (1936-2014) a gentle teacher who led by example and spoke truth in a soft voice,

**Ma Thanda** whose resolve for justice even in the darkest hour continues to inspire us,

**Felismina da Conceicao** and **Maria de Fatima** who opened the way, and all the women who gave a part of themselves to participate in this research.

# Our Women Survivors

## INDONESIA

### Aceh

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Ainun Mardiah  
Darni  
Jauhari  
Lisa Fitriana  
Maimunah  
Mariani  
Muharramah  
Rukiah Ahmad  
Saidah  
Saudah  
Saranah

### Yogyakarta

---

Christina Sumarmiyati  
Endang Lestari  
Hartiti  
Kadmiyati  
Oni Ponirah  
Sri Lestari  
Sri Wahyuni  
Sujilah  
Sujirah  
Sumilah  
Tri Endang Batari

### Pulau Buru

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Juariah  
Lasinem  
Mada  
Ngabinem  
Rodiah  
Sri  
Suhartini  
Subiyanti

## Kupang

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Anthoneta Dami Dato-Kitu Mira  
Ferderika Bessie  
Frangkina Boboy  
Heni Leba-Dethan  
Migelina A. Markus  
Sarloti Dami Dato-Kopi Ledo  
Vena Taka  
Yohana Hermanus-Delu  
Angelina Soares  
Amelia Soares  
Domingas Soares  
Ediana Maria Soares  
Juleta da Costa Belo  
Julimida Soares  
Mariana Soares  
Marcelina Monteiro Guterres  
Rosa Soares Lopez  
Olandina da Silva-Ximenes  
Teresa Fretas

## Papua

---

Estefina Wonar  
Hana Bano  
Irene Sroyer  
Naomi Masa  
Mariones Yarona  
Martha Adadikam  
Marthina Workarar  
Martince Anes  
Sara Awendu  
Welmina Rumbrawer-Karma

## TIMOR-LESTE

### Ainaro

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Agripina Soares  
Alda Baptista Barros  
Ana Paula Maria Pereira Soares  
Celestina de Lima  
Domingas Araújo Guterres

Felismina de Araújo  
Jacinta de Araújo  
Julieta da Conceição da Costa  
Lina Magno  
Lucia Bianco  
Margarida Pereira  
Maria de Fatima Fernandes  
Maria Martins  
Martinha da Conceição Araújo  
Prisca da Conceição  
Rita Barros

### **Bobonaro**

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Agripina dos Santos  
Anaberta dos Santos  
Ana Paula Soares Ximenes  
Bendita Buicau  
Celestina dos Santos Amaral  
Domingas Moniz  
Iria Boedasi Moniz  
Joana dos Santos Mota  
Juvita Saldanha  
Santina Rica Maia Moniz  
Teresinha Soares Cardoso  
Victoria da Silva

### **Baucau**

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Antonia das Neves  
Filomena de Fátima  
Herminia da Costa  
Juliana Pereira  
Julieta Correia Pereira  
Maria da Gloria Lemos Ximenes  
Maria de Fatima  
Maria Luisa do Rego  
Maria Palmira da Costa  
Paulina da Costa  
Sofia da Costa

### **Marabia/Dili**

---

Amelia da Conceição  
Augusta de Jesus Araújo  
Augusta Soriano da Silva  
Domingas de Araújo Mendonça  
Felismina dos Santos da Conceição  
Maria Imaculada

Josefa Adão da Silva  
Lucília da S. Alves  
Rosita Maia da Costa  
Terezinha de Jesus

### **MYANMAR<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Kachin**

---

Hkawng Shawng  
Ma Bu  
Ma Hka  
Ma Htang  
Ma Htu  
Ma Kaw  
Ma Lum  
Ma Roi  
Ma Ying

#### **Karen**

---

Htay Htay  
Htoo Htoo  
Mu Dah  
Nyar Bwe  
Nyar Eh Khu  
Nyar Hto Tue  
Nyar Si  
Paw Poe  
Pee Pee  
Tar Thue

#### **Yangon**

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Cho Cho Aye  
Hnin Hnin Hmwe  
Khin Mi Mi Khaine  
Mar Mar Oo  
Ni Mo Hlaing  
Ohmar  
San San Maw  
Thanda  
Thet Thet Aung  
Tin Tin Cho

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<sup>1</sup> For security reason, pseudonyms have been used to replace their real names.



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# Women Victims: Invisible but not Helpless

The subject of war and rape continues to dominate the headlines, but media attention span is typically short. Women are portrayed as victims, almost interchangeable from one conflict to another. Their stories are not told within a longer time-frame, women are mainly presented as traumatized victims. Thus, creating a “stunned deer-effect” without a voice or any kind of capacity for creating change. The intense focus on rape also distorts other forms of violence and violations experienced by women, such as unlawful detention, different forms of torture and inhumane treatment, displacement, loss of livelihood, and vulnerabilities relating to the death or disappearance of a family member.

Women victims are haunted by invisibility and silence—both before and after their abuse. Women are most likely to be victimized precisely because they are pushed to the edge of society—marginalized, perhaps even demonized, and disempowered. Likewise, the full truth about what happened to them, and how it continues to affect their lives, is erased or denied—not only by the state, local authorities and the national elite, but often even those in their community and their own families.

Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) is conducting a participatory research on how women experience conflict, and in its aftermath, struggle to survive in situations where impunity is the norm. Capturing in-depth stories of 140 women survivors from Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Myanmar, our research brings key lessons on how these women have helped themselves, while largely remaining invisible to those providing aid in conflict and post-conflict settings. In the rush to create peace, authorities want victims of war to become invisible, and magically transform themselves into ordinary citizens without any special support. At the same time, governments and international actors fail to see the link between violence during war and violence in times of peace, providing resources to eliminate domestic violence and ignoring those victimized during conflict.

AJAR’s research is relevant as violence against women continue to impact our lives, in many different forms, despite decades of activism and resources dedicated to stop it. One of the main findings of this research is that violence against women is empowered and maintained by a culture of impunity. Each woman who took part in this participatory research has a compelling story, but woven together they provide a stark picture about

how, despite great efforts, the UN, governments, and NGOs fail to pave the way for their survival. From their stories, we see how they largely helped themselves using their strength and tenacity fighting for their survival in grim situations.

As advocates for women victims, this invisibility and misapprehension of the true nature of their plight too frequently colors our (incomplete) understanding as we try to assist them in healing and advocate on their behalf. We often fail to fully appreciate the depth and breadth of women's suffering, and so our efforts to "help" —whether through truth commissions, criminal trials, even development projects—often widely miss their mark. As a result, many victims continue to suffer, as do their children.

Two decades since the Fourth World Conference on Women, it is high time to take stock on how we have progressed or regressed from the global commitments made at this historical meeting. Specifically, Critical Area E on Women and Armed Conflict continues to be a relevant and significant document in the promotion of peace and security for women in the Asia-Pacific region. It articulated important elements in the global pursuit for ensuring the fulfillment of the human rights of women affected by conflict. This included:

- Acknowledgement of the pattern of gender-based violations experienced by women
- A call to protect and prevent these violations in all situations of conflict
- Recognition of the long-term psycho-social, and economic impact of violence and displacement experienced by women
- Affirmation for the obligation to bring justice to perpetrators
- Articulation of the necessity for women's full participation in attaining and sustaining peace

# Excerpts from Critical Area E: Issues and Priorities

“Massive violations of human rights, especially in the form of genocide, ethnic cleansing as a strategy of war and its consequences, and rape, including systematic rape of women in war situations, creating a mass exodus of refugees and displaced persons, are abhorrent practices that are strongly condemned and must be stopped immediately, while perpetrators of such crimes must be punished...” [Par. 131]

“All violations of this kind, including in particular murder, rape, including systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy require a particularly effective response. Gross and systematic violations and situations that constitute serious obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights continue to occur in different parts of the world. Such violations and obstacles include, as well as torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or summary and arbitrary detention, all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, denial of economic, social and cultural rights and religious intolerance...” [Par. 132]

“The impact of violence against women and violation of the human rights of women in such situations is experienced by women of all ages, who suffer displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration, and who are victims of acts of murder, terrorism, torture, involuntary disappearance, sexual slavery, rape, sexual abuse and forced pregnancy in situations of armed conflict, especially as a result of policies of ethnic cleansing and other new and emerging forms of violence. This is compounded by the life-long social, economic and psychologically traumatic consequences of armed conflict and foreign occupation and alien domination.” [Par. 135]

The document made 6 strategic objectives on women and conflict:

- E.1 Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation.
- E.2 Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments.

- E.3 Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.
- E.4 Promote women’s contribution to fostering a culture of peace.
- E.5 Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women.
- E.6 Provide assistance to the women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories.

For the purpose of evaluating the progress of these objectives from the perspective of AJAR’s research, we have focused on the implementation of 4 areas formulated as action points in the Critical Area E document:

**Strategic Objective E.1.a on Women’s Participation on Peace Processes:**

“Take action to promote equal participation of women and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels.”

**Strategic Objective E.3.d & e on Protection, Investigation & Redress for Women Victims of War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide:**

“Reaffirm that rape in the conduct of armed conflict constitutes a war crime and under certain circumstances it constitutes a crime against humanity and an act of genocide as defined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; take all measures required for the protection of women and children from such acts and strengthen mechanisms to investigate and punish all those responsible and bring the perpetrators to justice...”

“Uphold and reinforce standards set out in international humanitarian law and international human rights instruments to prevent all acts of violence against women in situations of armed and other conflicts; undertake a full investigation of all acts of violence against women committed during war, including rape, in particular systematic rape, forced prostitution and other forms of indecent assault and sexual slavery; prosecute all criminals responsible for war crimes against women and provide full redress to women victims.”

### **Strategic Objective E.4.c on Research, Policies and Programmes to Address the Impact of Conflict on Women**

“Develop and disseminate research on the physical, psychological, economic and social effects of armed conflicts on women, particularly young women and girls, with a view to developing policies and programmes to address the consequences of conflicts.”

### **Strategic Objective E.5.c on Protection and Rehabilitation of Displaced and Refugees**

“Take steps to protect the safety and physical integrity of refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women during their displacement and upon their return to their communities of origin, including programmes of rehabilitation; take effective measures to protect from violence women who are refugees or displaced; hold an impartial and thorough investigation of any such violations and bring those responsible to justice.”

Source: Beijing Platform Critical Area E



## Our Methodology

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Taking to heart the participation of women survivors, we developed grassroots tools that reflected our commitment to involve women survivors as active agents for change, and not merely as vestiges of atrocities. Thus the research team was composed of NGO workers, survivors and their family members. As part of our methodology, we built in objectives that are beneficial to victims: to empower women survivors, to facilitate a collective healing process, and to build solidarity and networking.

# Time Line

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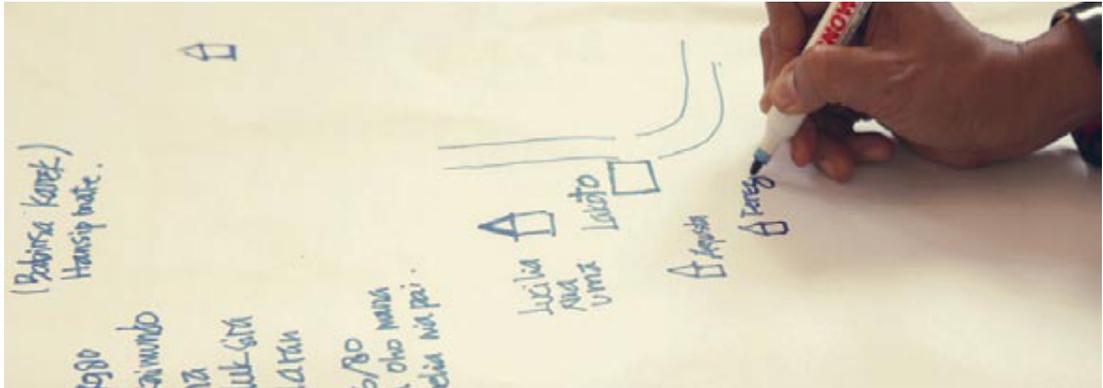
# 1



We used a time line to understand the violence experienced by women before, during and after conflict. We were able to build a collective history with broader perspectives than the individual alone can achieve.

# 2

## Community Mapping



Women victims were asked to draw a map that showed their homes, the places where violations took place, and other important locations from their story.

# Livelihood Mapping

# 3



Together, women victims tell each other about their sources of livelihood, before during and after conflict. This process deepened our knowledge of the cycle of poverty experienced by women victims in post-conflict situations.

# 4

## Body Mapping



Borrowing from the women's health movement, we used body mapping as an opportunity for women victims to speak about how the violations they experiences impacted their bodies. Apart from pain, we also urged them mark the sites of happiness on their body map.



Participants were invited to choose a stone or a flower to describe whether the rights to truth, justice, healing and a life free from violence existed in their personal, family and community life. Their reasons for choosing a stone (if negative) or a flower (if positive) were discussed in the group.

# 6

## Taking Photos, Telling Stories



The researchers visited the homes of the women to create a photo story about their life, including portraits of locations and objects that have particular meanings.



# 7

## Memory Boxes



Victims were asked to fill a box with objects that hold sweet or bitter memories. They were also asked to write a story about their life experience on postcards. In the last meeting session, participants describe the contents of their boxes to the group.

## Geographical Focus

Our research focused on 3 countries. In Indonesia, research was carried out together with 5 local organizations in the provinces of Aceh, Yogyakarta, Papua, Maluku and East Nusa Tenggara. In Timor-Leste, AJAR's sister organization, ACBIT, focused on the districts of Ainaro, Baucau, Bobonaro and Dili. Whereas in Myanmar, Women's Organizations Network (WON) conducted activities with ex-political prisoners in Yangon, while Kachin Women Association - Thailand (KWAT) and Karen Women Empowerment Group (KWEAG) worked with women IDPs in Kachin and Karen communities, respectively.

## Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this process is the participation of women survivors, in articulating their issues and engaging with their own problem-solving. Working in contexts where impunity is entrenched, we were convinced that the research methodology must be designed to have some immediate benefit to the participants. Thus, researchers were trained in trauma support and used research tools that assisted victims through mutual support. As an in-depth and qualitative method, the research does not provide big picture quantitative findings. However, in this interim report, we have attempted to look at some of the patterns emerging from each country study.



# Overview

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	Indonesia	Timor-Leste	Myanmar
Strategic Objective E.1.a on Women's Participation on Peace Processes	<p>Although there were peace processes in conflicts zones in Aceh, Maluku and Poso (1999-2005), women were not able to participate in a significant way. An important exception was the Aceh, peace talks where the rebel group had a woman as part of their negotiating team. In Papua, civil society groups are campaigning for a peace dialog with the central government. Indigenous women are involved in this campaign, but to date Jakarta is not responding positively.</p>	<p>Prior to the UN-led referendum in 1999, women were involved in reconciliation talks between pro-Indonesia and pro-independence groups in Dare, Timor-Leste. Timorese women were involved in nation-building and peacebuilding, after UN peacekeepers arrived to assist in the transition to independence.</p>	<p>Women most concerned by the current peace process have no substantial knowledge about it and little trust or hope in its positive outcome. Organizations representing women's interests are excluded from any meaningful participation, and there is almost no women sitting at the discussion table. Civil society organizations call strongly for inclusion of women in the current negotiations and the future political dialogue.</p>
Strategic Objective E.3.d & e on Protection, Investigation & Redress for Women Victims of War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide	<p>The New Order regime (1965-1998) used military force and widespread violence to quell any dissent. In 1965-1966, the Indonesian military and armed groups killed up to 500,000 to 1 million persons, and detained hundreds of thousands for Members of left-leaning women's organizations, artists, teachers became the target of killings, illegal detention and sexual violence. The New Order dealt with dissent with force, in far-reaching provinces of Papua, East Timor and Aceh as well as against those defending their rights throughout other parts of Indonesia.</p> <p>In 1999-2000, the upper house and parliament passed resolutions for truth and justice. A human rights court with jurisdiction over genocide and crimes against humanity was established in 2000, however the court has a 100% acquittal rate for defendants tried under this law, and it is all but defunct. No cases of sexual crimes have ever been brought to trial.</p> <p>In 2006, a law establishing a national truth commission was annulled, thus blocking the way for truth commissions in Aceh and Papua, mandated under special autonomy laws. Civil society groups has recently concluded a truth-seeking process and launched a report concluding that systematic and widespread sexual violence took place in conflict zones between 1965-2005.</p>	<p>In 2000, the UN established a serious crimes court with jurisdiction over genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed at any time, as well as murder, sexual offences, and torture committed in 1999.<sup>2</sup> The legislation included sexual offences in its list of serious crimes<sup>3</sup> and adopted gender-sensitive rules of evidence lifted directly from the ICTY statute.<sup>4</sup></p> <p>Between 2000-2005, investigations led to 95 indictments involving more than 360 persons, including high-ranking Indonesian military officials. However, of the 95 indictments, only eight involved gender-based crimes. Six of these eight indictments were for rape as a crime against humanity and only <b>one</b> of the six cases went to trial resulting in the only conviction for rape as a crime against humanity. Sexual slavery and other types of sexual violence were never charged.</p> <p>In 2002-2005, a truth commission (CAVR) collected 8000 statements from victims &amp; witnesses 21% from women, organized public hearings including a thematic hearing on women and conflict. The CAVR made a finding that rape was committed as crimes against humanity, and made specific recommendations to eliminate gender-based violence and assist women victims</p>	<p>State violence against women of ethnic minorities is still prevalent. Most political prisoners have been released but harassment and imprisonment of social and political activists continue. Fighting is still ongoing in several ethnic areas. These violations continue to include sexual violence by military officials, as reported by the United Nations<sup>5</sup> and local groups.<sup>6</sup> Impunity for these crimes reflects a general impunity for other serious crimes. The 2008 Constitution maintains the military dominance over the government and allows it to protect its interests in perpetuity. The lack of transparency, accountability and weak rule of law have left a legacy in which many institutions are weak and still controlled by the military, and thousands of very serious human rights violations have not been addressed.</p> <p>Despite signing the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in July 2014, the government still shows no willingness to put an end to this system of impunity. Women victims continue to have no prospects of accessing justice and no recognition of their experience of violence. The Myanmar National Human Rights Commission is still ineffective, lacking independence and impartiality, and unresponsive to survivors' complaints.</p> <p>The 2008 constitution allows equality of rights for all its citizens &amp; prohibits discrimination, however also contain language that entrench gender stereotypes and protect "positions that are naturally suitable for men only." Women are denied any substantial role in the military, which maintains control over the parliament and most political and economic places of power.</p>

<p>Strategic Objective E.4.c on Research, Policies and Programmes to Address the Impact of Conflict on Women</p>	<p>A presidential decree (18/2014) was recently promulgated to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The decree makes commitment to support research and programmes for women and children effected by conflict. However, its implementation remains to be seen.</p>	<p>The law establishing the serious crimes panel also called for a Victims' Trust Fund, but this was never implemented.<sup>7</sup> There are no specific national programmes targeting victims, however, they are able to be included under other categories of vulnerability.</p>	<p>Women victims of the conflict and/or of state violence do not benefit from any assistance or support from the authorities. Small material support is provided in some cases by civil society organizations but is largely non-significant in comparison to the needs. Women continue to face extreme difficulties accessing basic medical care and do not receive psychological support. Most of them live in poverty and all continue to struggle for their livelihood without any help from the government.</p> <p>The 2013 National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) does not specifically include women victims of conflict-related violence and the institutional framework needed to realize it remains absent.</p>
<p>Strategic Objective E.5.c on Protection and Rehabilitation of Displaced and Refugees</p>	<p>A continuing challenge for both governments in Indonesia and Timor-Leste, is the presence of approximately 5000 households of refugees in West Timor, Indonesia. Escaping the violence in 1999, hundreds of thousands of refugees crossed the border seeking safety. A large-scale repatriation program succeeded in returning most of these refugees. A small number, many connected to pro-Indonesia militia families, opted not to return. However, they continue to live in dire conditions, are poorly integrated into the local communities, and live in a time-warp dominated by former militia from the conflict. Many of the women in the camps are now elderly, some isolated from the family members in Timor-Leste.</p>	<p>Myanmar still counts hundreds of thousands of displaced and refugees, and more civilians are being displaced by conflict and violence at the time of writing. Women in situations of displacement continue to live in extremely precarious conditions. They believe that return to their villages of origin is necessary to ensure their safety, livelihood, access to land and adequate housing. However, they have little prospects that safe return will be possible in the near future. Sustainable peace, including comprehensive political agreements between the government and ethnic groups that take into consideration the needs and rights of IDPs and refugees, is necessary to ensure their security and rehabilitation.</p>	

<sup>2</sup> UNTAET Regulation 2000/15 (June 6, 2000) on the Establishment of Special Panel for Serious Crimes

<sup>3</sup> UNTAET Regulation 2000/11, Section 10.1.

<sup>4</sup> UNTAET Regulation 2000/30 on Transitional Rules of Criminal Procedures, Section 34.3 states that cases of sexual assault require no corroboration, limits the use of consent as a defense by the suspect, and bars admittance of the victim's prior sexual conduct as evidence.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Secretary-General (2014), 'Conflict-related sexual violence', p.12-13, United Nations Security Council

<sup>6</sup> See for example Women's League of Burma, "*Same Impunity, Same Patterns*", January 2014

<sup>7</sup> UNTAET Regulation 15/2000, Sections 24 and 25.

## Key Findings

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# Women continue to experience systematic violence during conflict.

# 1

Despite an increase in global awareness and rhetoric to prevent systematic violence against women since the Beijing Conference in 1995, armies and armed groups continued to target women with impunity in conflicts waged in the three countries.

In **Timor-Leste**, in 1999, women experienced unlawful detention, rape and torture during the time of a UN-sponsored referendum. Many were forcibly displaced, and some remain as forgotten refugees in Indonesia's West Timor. Out of 51 women victims who participated in this research, 18 lost their husbands during the conflict, almost half (24) were unlawfully detained. From the 19 who experienced torture, 18 also experienced sexual violence.

In **Aceh, Indonesia**, martial law was declared in 2003 when attempts to create a ceasefire and peace process fell through. All of the 11 women who participated in the research from Aceh experienced torture and inhumane treatment during the time of heightened military operations. Almost one-third experienced some form of sexual violence.

In **Myanmar**, women experienced discrimination and violence due to political or ethnic-based conflict. In ethnic areas where armed conflict have been waged for decades, women also experience extremely long periods of displacement, resulting in loss of livelihood and opportunities, and exposure to new forms of violence due to renewed fighting and/or the risks created by heavy militarization, with no prospects of safe return. Out of a group of 19 women living in ethnic areas who participated in this research, two were grandmothers or mothers who were seeking justice for their daughters (or granddaughter) who were brutally raped and murdered, and one experienced sexual violence herself. Women victims, especially those living in refugee camps, shoulder the double burden to recover from their own violation and to care for their families. Survival becomes more difficult when a son or husband is detained, disappeared or killed. Ethnic women faced double discrimination and challenges, as they were caught between both sides of the conflict, experiencing pressure and danger from both warring factions. Out of a group of 10 women former political prisoners, 7 experienced torture and inhumane treatment, including sexualized forms of torture and sexual harassment in detention.



“From here, they herded me like a criminal; I was ordered to walk in front of them to the end of the road. The neighbours were watching secretly from their house. People were watching at me like I was a spy.”

## **Mariani**

Aceh, Indonesia

## **Felismina de Araújo**

Ainaro, Timor-Leste

“While I was at the military command, I was gang-raped. I told them that I was 4 month pregnant, but they didn't care and threatened me instead. They said they would dump me to the river if I resisted. I cried.”



## **Yohana Hermanus-Delu**

Kupang, Indonesia

“They came for me without an arrest warrant and brought me to the Merdeka Stadium. At the General Hospital, the doctor stripped me to look for a hammer and sickle sign.”



“In 1990, I was arrested when I was eight months pregnant; they were looking for my husband because they thought he was a GAM Commander. I was taken to Military Headquarters. I took my little children. I was there for a long time, heavily pregnant.”

## Maimunah

Aceh, Indonesia



## Paw Poe

Karen, Myanmar

“In 1999, they developed an army unit that killed people abruptly. They would not care whether you were guilty or not, they just killed people. They drove us out from our village, then later on asked us to move back. In 2004, they made us move again.”

“The soldiers treated me as they wished. They not only forced us to dance, but also groped us, threatened us, took us to the forest, and slept with us.”

## Sofia da Costa

Baucau, Timor-Leste



“When the militias saw my husband, they captured him and killed him cruelly. They cut off his head and put it on a tree, while his body was dumped into a river.”



## Anaberta dos Santos

Bobonaro, Timor-Leste



*Ma Lum has been displaced several times because of the fighting and lost all her properties. The IDP camp in which she had taken refuge was bombed by the army and she had to flee again. Her husband was killed during an attack on their village. She got injured while trying to flee the fighting and never received proper medical care.*

## Ma Lum

Kachin, Myanmar

“Before sending me to prison, they interrogated me for day and night without giving me chance to sleep. I was not allowed to sleep, to take a bath, and to eat regularly. They tortured us a lot spiritually. They used a lot of words which hurt a woman’s dignity.”



## Tin Tin Cho

Yangon, Myanmar

## Women take action for peace but remain peripheral in negotiations.

In **Myanmar**, the research showed that women victims in ethnic rural areas, in particular women most affected by the conflict (past or present) and living in situation of displacement, do not have any substantial knowledge about the peace process. Beyond the fact that the previously- fighting groups are talking to each other, they do not have any meaningful understanding or knowledge of the discussions taking place in their name at the political level. Their analysis of it is one of doubt, distrust and skepticism as to the potential positive outcome of the process. Even grassroots women organizations and civil society organizations representing women's interests are excluded from any meaningful participation or input in the peace process discussions, and there is almost no women sitting at the discussion table.<sup>8</sup>

In **Aceh, Indonesia**, although women played a major role in mitigating the conflict, providing humanitarian support to victims, monitoring human rights violations and advocating for peace, only one woman from the rebel group GAM (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, Free Aceh Movement) participated in the official peace process. The affirmation of sharia law under special autonomy (2006) in Aceh has put in place a morality code that often results in discrimination against women. In **Papua, Indonesia**, a civil society push for peace talks between indigenous leaders and the central government has been on the boil for many years. But women's participation remains minimal.

The conflict in **Timor-Leste** was not resolved by a peace process, but through a referendum supported by the United Nations as agreed by Indonesia and Portugal. Young Timorese women took an active part in voter education and others provided humanitarian care for victims of violence. After the referendum, women played an important role in peace-building in the transition towards independence. Women were involved in the interim government, in writing the constitution and eventually, in parliament and elected government.

<sup>8</sup> "Where Are The Women: Negotiations for Peace in Burma," Swedish Burma Committee, May 2013; "Looking at the Current Peace Process in Myanmar through a Gender Lens," Salai Isaac Khen and Muk Yin Haung Nyo, August 2014.



“I lost my right to teach because there was a prohibition from the government. So, I did everything I could to fulfil my needs, I work hard day and night. My motto was to transform a disaster into a blessing.”

## **Christina Sumarmiyati**

Yogyakarta, Indonesia

“The people here are not guilty, but they were forced to confess. They merely followed, when infact they were innocent.”

## **Juariah**

Buru Island, Indonesia



“We always come together to commemorate the attack in Marabia. The leaders never want to join us although we send them an invitation.”

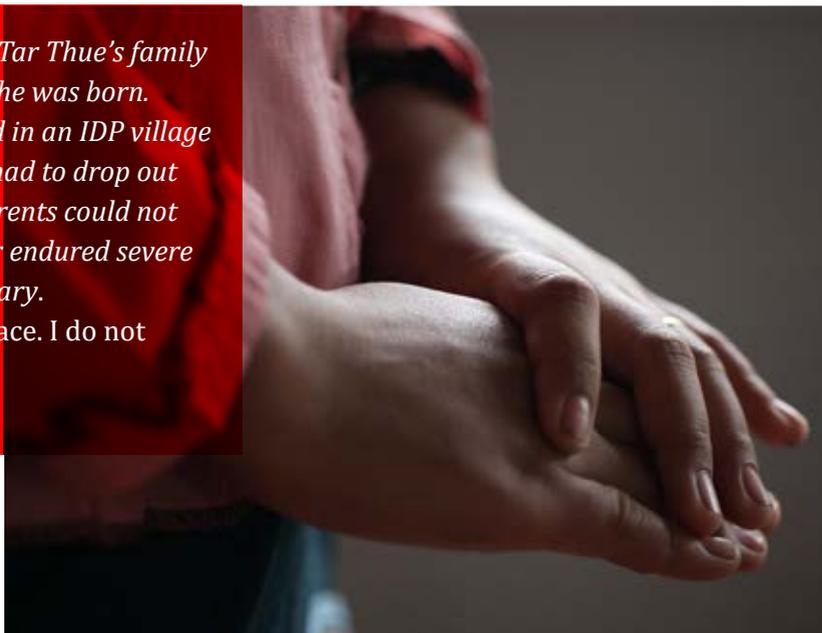
## **Maria Imaculada**

Dili, Timor-Leste

*The conflict forced Tar Thue's family to relocate before she was born. Hence, she has lived in an IDP village her whole life and had to drop out of school, as her parents could not afford it. Her father endured severe torture by the military.*  
"I want durable peace. I do not want wars."

## **Tar Thue**

Karen, Myanmar



## **Htay Htay**

Karen, Myanmar

"Even if there are peace talks, the Burmese military troops are still near us. I want the troops to withdraw because we are afraid of them."



## Lucia Bianco

Ainaro, Timor-Leste

“I feel pain because the people who were traitors now have a good position in the government. We who suffered received nothing.”

“I want peace so that everyone can leave peacefully and have a better life.”

## Mu Dah

Karen, Myanmar



“Former members of the rebel group who are now leaders in Aceh do not care about us. During the conflict, we took care of them very well, more than we did our own family. My heart hurts when I see this.”

## Saidah

Aceh, Indonesia

## Women victims experience an atrophy of justice.

Impunity was the norm experienced by most women victims of armed conflict and state violence, including victims of sexual violence, participating in this research. Out of 140 women, only 10 were able to bring their case to court. Like a wasted muscle, women victims lose the ability to even imagine how to demand the righting of a wrong. In many rural communities or small towns where the women are from conformity is desired. Being a victim of a human rights violation makes one distinct from the crowd. To compensate, women victims down play what they experienced.

In **Myanmar**, 3 women out of 29, or their families, have attempted to seek justice: 2 were unsuccessful and the outcome of the other one was dissatisfying for the family. In all 3 cases the process led to further harassment and problems for the victims or their families.

In **Timor-Leste**, only 7 women out of 51 were involved in the UN-supported serious crimes investigations and trials. Six of these were trials of former militia members who were found guilty of murdering their husbands or family members. Only one case involved investigation and conviction of rape as a crime against humanity.

In **Indonesia**, none out of the 60 women were able to access justice for the violations that they experienced. In Aceh, in particular, there are government development assistance funds specifically earmarked for victims of conflict yet many women were unable to access these benefits because they were drained off by those with connections to the new government

In all three countries, women victims and their communities believed that seeking justice or redress will only bring additional problems and suffering upon them, leading to resignation and acceptance. This is reinforced by the failure of law enforcement and judiciary to investigate or prosecute perpetrators. The longer impunity persists, women's confidence and capacity to articulate the injustice they experienced and to advocate to right a wrong wither away.



“We can only pray for the perpetrators. If they are not punished, let God punish them.”

## Martha Adadikam

Papua, Indonesia

## Maria Palmira da Costa

Baucau, Timor-Leste

“My wounds have still yet to heal. I’m waiting for justice but even now there is still no justice for me.”



“We’ve never got justice. I hope the government will apologise to the victims.”

**Oni Ponirah**

Yogyakarta, Indonesia



**Marcelina Monteiro  
Guterres**

Kupang, Indonesia

“They came to collect all of our data. Only those whose families were all there could get assistance. Those of us who were widowed got nothing. The government forgot us.”



“Justice must be served on those who did wrong to us.... The truth must be upheld so that we can feel relief.”

## Margarida Pereira

Ainaro, Timor-Leste



“They sent me to the military tribunal under various accusations. I did not commit those actions. Even how hard I tried to submit my argument, the one who made the decision was not a judge. They were military officers. They opened the envelop which they brought along with them, took out the letter from inside and read the sentence: ‘3 years imprisonment with hard labor.’”

## Mar Mar Oo

Yangon, Myanmar

“I tried to organise a letter so that my two children to could get government assistance, but they just told me to wait.”



## Juliana Pereira

Baucau, Timor-Leste



## Thanda

Yangon, Myanmar

“Because of my experiences in being oppressed, I must say that there is no justice. To have justice, we need to have a law that will fulfill the needs of the citizens, protect them and apply equally to everyone. The system must be free of bribery and corruption.”



## Ma Ying

Kachin, Myanmar

*Ma Ying was raped by members of the government security forces. She initiated a complaint with relevant authorities and has since then been harassed and threatened by the security forces. She would like to pursue a judicial process to defend her rights but she knows it will take time and a lot of money. She cannot afford it as she needs to work daily to maintain her subsistence. She also fears for her safety.*

## Frangkina Boboy

Kupang, Indonesia

*“They just let them (the perpetrators) go. So, there was no justice whatsoever.”*



# Victims' struggle for economic survival makes it difficult for them to pursue judicial processes or try to fulfill their rights in other ways.

# 4

Along side the attacks against their personal integrity, many women victims also experienced violations of their social and economic rights. In some contexts, these violations were much more widespread and yet largely undocumented and missing from accounts of periods of conflict and oppression. These abuses include the loss of land and livelihoods, destruction of homes and possessions, forced displacement to squalid camps, and exclusion from education and health care services. The abuses are not only widespread but can often extend over many years, if not decades.

These hardships have eroded women's understanding of justice and haunted their attempts at healing. Our research found that when asked about whether they felt that "justice" had been done, the women's answers were largely negative and revealed a concept of justice that included, not only a wish to see perpetrators punished or the state apparatus acknowledge the victim's innocence and their status as victims, but also the belief that the proper role of a legitimate state is to provide equally for their citizens, without discrimination, in order for them to obtain a decent standard of living and basic human dignity. In some cases, women relegated justice to the after-life, as they cannot see how they can get justice in this life.



## Filomena de Fatima

Baucau, Timor-Leste

“Although I am still alive, I feel as if I were dead because I don’t have anything to pay for my child’s education. She was expelled from school.”

“The back part of my house was completely destroyed in the violence in 1999. They said there would be assistance, but in fact there was nothing.”

## Sri

Buru Island, Indonesia





## Saranah

Aceh, Indonesia

“My feet and knees often make it hard for me to walk, to stand up and to sit down. I need to buy medicine, but I have no money, I just have to hope my children will help me. I need treatment for my health.”



## Kadmiyati

Yogyakarta, Indonesia

“After I got out of Bantul Camp, I sold food. Every day I had to leave at 3 am and walk up to 10 kilometres to the market.”



**Terezinha de Jesus**

Dili, Timor-Leste

“The government must pay attention to the other victims whose lives are still so miserable.”



“I’m still struggling to get government support to pay for my children to go to university, I can’t to afford to pay for them even though I get a veterans pension.”

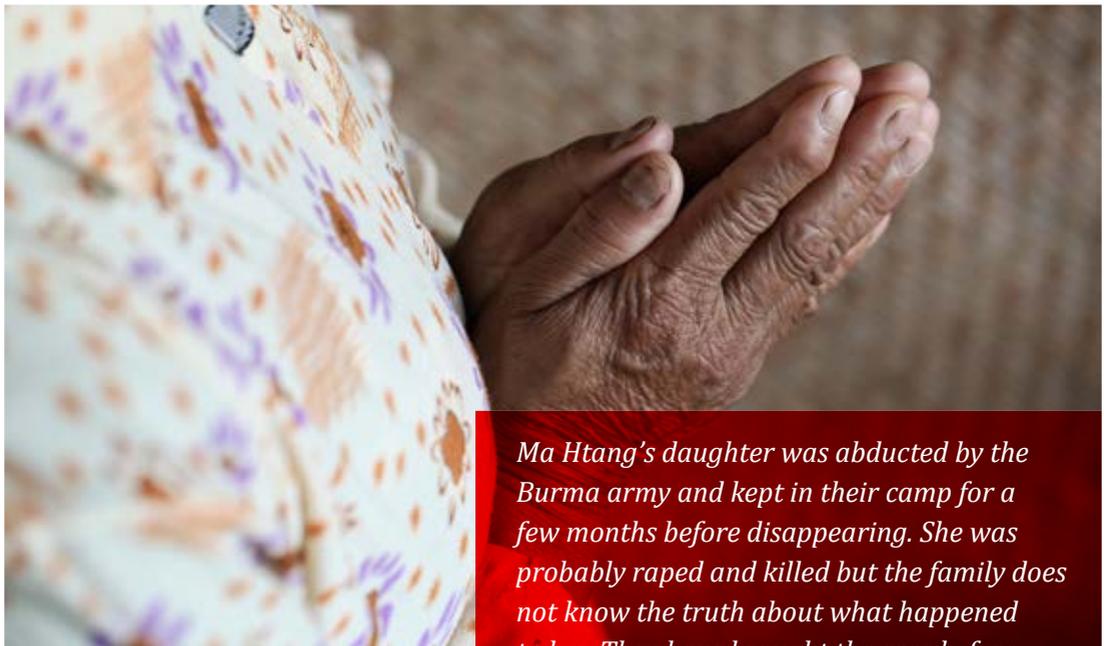
**Lina Magno**

Ainaro, Timor-Leste

“The only reparation I got is that my husband wrote a poem for me...”

## Sun Sun Maw

Yangon, Myanmar



## Ma Htang

Kachin, Myanmar

*Ma Htang's daughter was abducted by the Burma army and kept in their camp for a few months before disappearing. She was probably raped and killed but the family does not know the truth about what happened to her. They have brought the case before the Supreme Court who rejected it without hearing the evidence. While they still hope to obtain justice one day, they struggle every day for their livelihood in the IDP camp.*



**Ma Kaw**  
Kachin, Myanmar

*Ma Kaw had to flee an attack on her village. The army burned her village and she lost everything. In the forest, she got attacked and shot by the Burma army, together with other villagers. Her granddaughter was abducted and killed. She believes she was sexually abused. Today, Ma Kaw lives in an IDP village and struggles for her survival.*

*“Even if I die before justice comes to us, my great grand-children will be trying to get it and I hope they will live happily.”*

## Women demand recognition about their experience of violence, but this needs to be integrated with long-term support.

# 5

Victims articulated the need to recognize their suffering and a genuine commitment from society and state to eliminate the on-going stigma they experience. However, recognition through ad-hoc mechanisms, such as truth commissions or trials as in the case of Timor-Leste, was significant but not enough. Long-term government and civil society programmes that provide social support and positive acknowledgment (as opposed to discrimination) must be designed and implemented beyond the life-time as such short-term mechanisms, to ensure that the memory and commitment to a culture against violence is transmitted to the next generation.

With the exception of Timor-Leste, Indonesia and Myanmar have yet to extend official recognition to victims. However, civil society initiatives go far in filling the vacuum created by governments that continue to deny the mass violations.

In **Myanmar**, this demand for recognition extends to local ethnic political and armed groups, in the case of women living in conflict or post-conflict areas, and to organizations of fellow ex-political prisoners in the case of women who have been unlawfully detained and persecuted for their political or social activism.

In **Timor-Leste**, some of the women expressed bitterness that they had been asked to recount their painful stories in public by the truth commission or serious crimes court, and then forgotten again. They have not received any support or assistance while they are still trapped in a cycle of poverty and discrimination.

In **Indonesia**, civil society groups and human rights institutions are finding creative ways to acknowledge victims. However, long-term assistance and support for victims and their families remain a critical unmet need.



“A member of UN Serious Crime Unit came to interview me, took my photograph, but until now, I haven’t received any information about justice.”

## Santina Rica Maia

Bobonaro, Timor-Leste

“My father and my brother died for this country’s independence. My mother and I also struggled to protect Xanana Gusmao when he hid from the military. But, after the independence, nobody remembered our sacrifice.”



## Lucilia da S. Alves

Dili, Timor-Leste



“When I remember what happened to me I cry, but it’s so important to remember it, so that people know about my suffering, what it was like then.”

## Ainun Mardiah

Aceh, Indonesia



“Society should apologise for the things it has done wrong in the past.”

## Tri Endang Batari

Yogyakarta, Indonesia

“Even today, we don’t feel like we’ve been acknowledged. The term PKI or political prisoners is still mentioned until now. There is a label on us.”

## Mada

Buru Island, Indonesia



“They laugh at what I say, but I’m not going to stay silent. I’ll keep fighting so that people acknowledge my suffering.”

## Maria de Fatima

Baucau, Timor-Leste



“The trauma we get from our political colleagues hurts more than the trauma we get from the authorities.”

## Ni Mo Hlaing

Yangon, Myanmar

“I have not gained the truth yet because I haven’t seen my daughter’s body, I do not know what really happened to her.”



## Ma Htang

Kachin, Myanmar



## Khin Mi Mi Khaine

Yangon, Myanmar

“I was traumatized by the way my political colleagues treated me.”

# Restoration of the rights of citizenship, including addressing discrimination in provision of identity cards, birth and marriage certificates.

## 6

Women victims face discrimination and exclusion decades after the violence took place. This stigma weakens the local social supports that many rely on to survive, and resulted in discrimination that further reduces their access to government services and sources of assistance. Even the children of victims experience public stigma and discrimination in their ability to access employment and schooling, and their ability to process basic government citizenship documents such as ID cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses.

In **Timor-Leste**, some women faced difficulties getting a birth certificate their offspring born out of rape, because they could not name the biological father in the application form.

In **Indonesia**, daughters of political prisoners in Buru Island married to former political prisoners in a mass wedding organized by the military in 1978 received marriage certificates that stated their occupation as “prisoners from the 30<sup>th</sup> September communists movement.” Discovered during our action research, now local officials have issued an apology and produced a new marriage certificate. In the same island, some former political prisoners did not have ID cards which were a prerequisite for applying for a newly established national health insurance program.

In **Myanmar**, some ethnic women living in situations of displacement in conflict or post-conflict areas do not have adequate identity documents, as they have been lost or destroyed in the violence and/or women do not have access to the relevant administrative authorities. This has an important impact on their freedom to travel within the country. Some women ex-political prisoners still face discrimination by the authorities in terms of access to employment for example.

## Welmina Rumbrawer-Karma

Papua, Indonesia

"It is difficult for my children to go to school! They also cannot find jobs. My child cried, maybe because of my [history], she couldn't find a job anywhere."



"We couldn't move freely because we were stigmatized as members of Fretilin and as communists." We were interrogated everyday. We also had to arrange a letter signed by the head of village to be able to receive aid."

## Maria da Gloria

Baucau, Timor-Leste

## Anthoneta Dami Dato-Kitu Mira

Kupang, Indonesia

"We were humiliated; they called us 'Gerwani dogs.' We couldn't wear nice clothes because they would label us: "Huh! The Gerwani dogs are starting to go out, looking for dead men to do."





“I had to hide my identity as a former political prisoner. If anyone knew, the consequence would be being fired from my job.”

## Sujirah

Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## Suhartini

Buru Island, Indonesia

“I was married in mass wedding in 1977. In the marriage record, my husband’s occupation was written as G30S prisoner. It was like I was punished all my life for the writing in that wedding record.”



“I hope the government find a solution to fulfil our rights as citizens of this nation, especially those of us who are victims of conflict.”

## Alda Baptista

Ainaro, Timor-Leste





## Domingas Moniz

Bobonaro, Timor-Leste

“As a victim, I am saddened by the fact that even after all my sufferings everything is still unfair, there is still no justice. I tried to approach the government to ask for help and assistance for my children but it was in vain.”

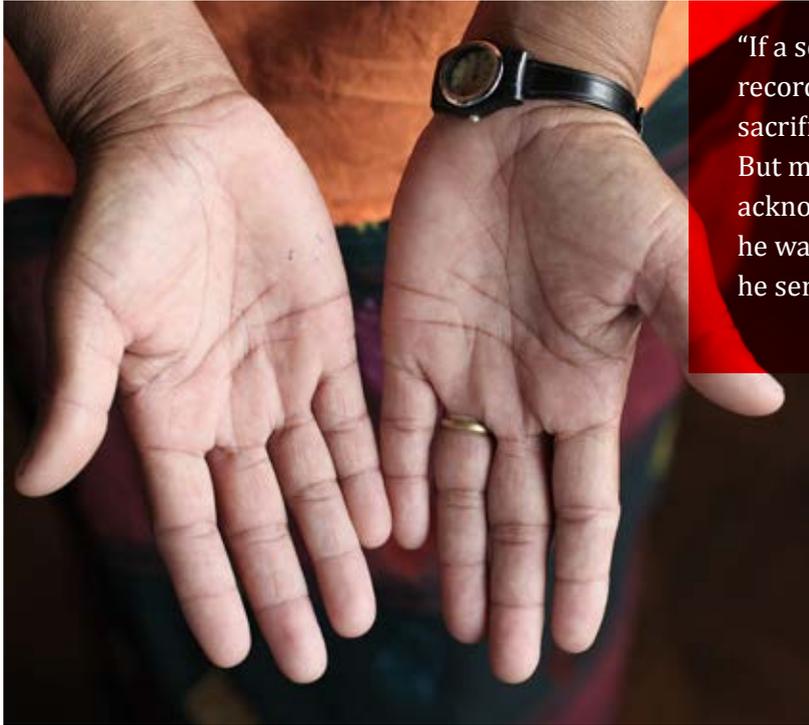
## Hnin Hnin Hmwe

Yangon, Myanmar

*Hnin Hnin Hmwe used to be a lecturer/tutor and cannot hold this position anymore.*

“I want only one thing and that is equality. Equality where there is no discrimination between race, religion, skin and gender, a true federal union country with freedom and peace.”





“If a soldier died, he was recorded in history as a sacrifice for our people. But my son did not get any acknowledgement because he was not a soldier even he served until he died.”

## Ma Hka

Kachin, Myanmar

“As my father was also imprisoned at the same time, we had to mortgage our house and land. When we got released from prison after three years, we lost our house. Home for me is disappeared since then.”

## Mar Mar Oo

Yangon, Myanmar





## Marking sites of violence is a way to combat impunity and articulate a commitment not to repeat it.

# 7

Women victims feel the sting of impunity everyday when they live near the sites where they were violated. And yet, their silence about what took place is fortified when the community and authorities around them make no gesture of acknowledgement, nor do they mark specific days or spaces of a violent act or acts took place. This collective silence sends a message to victims that what happened is accepted, that victims deserved what happened to them, and may happen again.

In **Timor-Leste**, women victims are active members of a national association of victims that organize local commemorations of massacres during the conflict.

In **Indonesia**, attempts by victim's groups to organize themselves or commemorate significant events still invite negative response from authorities and vigilante groups. Former political prisoners from 1965 in Jogja were attacked by groups linked to the military when they met to plan economic activities.

In **Myanmar**, the absolute lack of recognition by the government of the violations experienced by women living in ethnic areas, the length of the conflict and violence, and the fact that fighting is continuing or renewed in some areas, gives women victims a sense that violence is the norm. Given the continuous dominance of the military over the political institutions and the lack of commitment to end repression of political and social dissent, women ex-political prisoners who maintain their activism continue to be at risk.



## Amelia da Conceição

Dili, Timor-Leste

“If the state wants to search for the ones who disappeared, we will show the location where they were taken.”

“I hope the government can give attention to we as the poverty stricken victims. I also hope the government will not repeat all these forms of violence and torture on the people.”

## Rukiah Ahmad

Aceh, Indonesia



## Migelina A. Markus

Kupang, Indonesia

“My work is to tell the truth to people [about what happened in the past] so that this bitter history will not repeated again.”

"I've kept my brother's black clothes. He was disappeared and probably had died. So, when I look at these clothes, I remember him."

## Irene Sroyer

Papua, Indonesia



## Rita Barros

Ainaro, Timor-Leste

"My father and two of his brothers were brought and then dumped into a ravine that is widely known as Jakarta Dua (the Second Jakarta)."

"When I see that place, I feel sad. Sometimes I wish I was dead."

## Jacinta de Araujo

Ainaro, Timor-Leste



“What I wish for is that.... we were arrested and sent to jail while we were studying; and we had to flee and hide for years. We had to experience terrible situations. I don’t want such kind things to happen to the next generation.”

## Hnin Hnin Hmwe

Yangon, Myanmar



## Ma Kaw

Kachin, Myanmar

“I want to go home, but I will not go home if there is still fighting.”

“I am not afraid to start over, from the beginning, but I am afraid that they will come and destroy everything again.”

## Thet Thet Aung

Yangon, Myanmar



## Women victims, out of sight out of mind.

Very few resources are relegated to mitigating the long-term impact of conflict on women. In the three countries, government officials want to wish away the past by ignoring it. Women victims use their meager resources to deal with loss (of life, security, land, livelihood, shelter), while facing discrimination and exclusion. All this compounds their weakened social support network and the lack of access to livelihood. For example, many women found their already precarious economic situation worsened by being socially ostracized for being rape victims or as survivors or children of political or ethnic groups that are being targeted: their land taken away, homes occupied, and even their own families refusing to take them in, either out of fear or suspicion.

For **Myanmar**, out of the 29 women involved in the research, none have received assistance from official institutions or organizations (one family received a small financial compensation from the military for the death of their daughter). Eight received some form of small material or financial support from local organizations or from the local ethnic armed groups.

**Timor-Leste** showed that truth and justice without on-going support for vulnerable victims sours victim's view of this mechanisms down the track. A trust fund for victims, legislated under the law establishing the UN-supported serious crimes court in 2000, was never established. The victim whose case led to the only conviction of rape as crime against humanity lives in extreme poverty. Victims who spoke to the truth commission felt that they were found then lost again. However 42 out of 51 victims received one-off assistance, from government or NGOs.

## Muharramah

Aceh, Indonesia

"I feel there is no justice. The village officers do not support the victims to receive aid from the local government. The other victims and I do not received any diyat (compensation according to Islamic law) from the government although we have submitted all the administrative procedures three times. Other people who were not victims get it instead."



"Until now, there is no recognition from the government for us as victims. We continue to be victims. The community also laugh at us. They say even monkeys have better luck than us."

## Felismina da Conceição

Dili, Timor-Leste

## Domingas Araujo Guterres

Ainaro, Timor-Leste

"Aid from the government never reached us. The village head has visited us twice, but we received nothing."





“After I was released from jail in Central Java, I had to accept the bitter reality that someone else was in charge in my home. I had to live without a roof over my head.”

## Sri Wahyuni

Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## Angelina Soares

Kupang, Indonesia

“I look after two children. My husband has already gone back to Timor-Leste. Because my children’s dowries haven’t been settled yet, I was left here alone.”



“Since the beginning of our struggle, we have been shouting for justice but after the independence we still get nothing about justice. I don’t think the leaders of this country are really paying attention to justice for those who suffered and lost. I think they are ignoring it.”

## Teresinha Soares Cardoso

Bobonaro, Timor-Leste



## **Bendita Buicau**

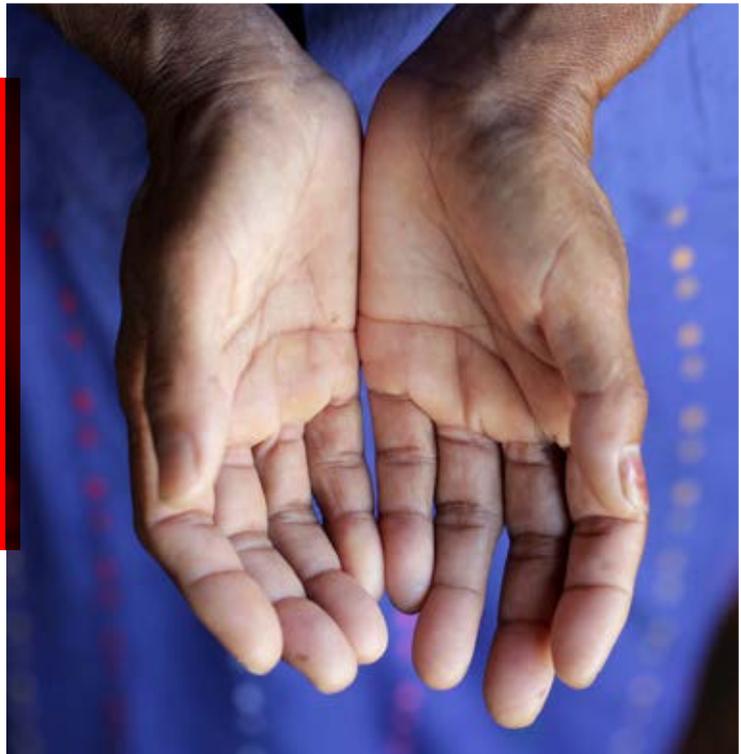
Bobonaro, Timor-Leste

"I work hard, breaking rocks, tilling crops to provide a livelihood for my children. I never had retribution from the person who raped me, because he is dead already. The Lord heard my prayers."

*Hkawn Shawng's daughter was gang raped and killed by Burmese soldiers. She herself had to flee from her village because of fighting. "Most of the time I am alone and I cry all the time."*

## **Hkawn Shawng**

Kachin, Myanmar





“My son was taking care of me. So after he was killed, the farming work also stopped and it is hard for me to survive now. Every night and every day I cry because of this.”

## Ma Roi

Kachin, Myanmar



## Ohmar

Yangon, Myanmar

“When I was released from prison, I could not success projects for my primary machine-made embroidery work from the businessmen, as they did not trust me anymore. I had to struggle a lot financially.”



## Women victims are vulnerable to new forms of violence, including domestic and community violence.

# 9

The vulnerability of women victims makes them susceptible to new forms of violence, including violence from land conflict, religious or communal conflict, as well as domestic violence. When the community and local authorities around them do not know or appreciate their experiences of violations in the past, they may suffer abuse or exploitation as any poor woman in their community.

In **Timor-Leste**, a survivor of torture and rape was put under house arrest by the Timorese police because she defended her plot of land from encroachment by her neighbor. A child born out of rape, disabled by childhood polio, was abused by her teacher.

In **Indonesia**, Acehnese women victims experienced domestic violence from male members of their family (husband and father, in two separate cases) who were also torture survivors. The lack of on-going services for trauma care for women and men leave them caught in a cycle of violence. In Buru Island, women who were brought as young girls to the prison island to accompany their father's detained there, were attacked during the 1999 religious conflict that swept the province of Maluku. The attackers targeted Christian families, previously living in harmony with their Muslim neighbors.

In **Myanmar**, the omnipresence of soldiers and army camps in the surroundings of IDP camps or villages in conflict or post-conflict areas exposes women to further violence, in particular sexual violence. The unstable political/military situation and in some cases renewed fighting leaves women victims in situation of uncertainty, isolation and insecurity. Women political prisoners often are not supported by their families and remain isolated.



“I feel sad that this happened to me. I experienced violence to save my husband, but then he left me and married another woman because of what I had been through.”

## Naomi Masa

Papua, Indonesia

“I experienced violence from my second husband, from my family, and from my community. I am too ashamed to go out of the house. I have reported my case to Fokupers and the village head, but nothing happened. All I can do is to accept my fate.”

## Joana dos Santos Mota

Bobonaro, Timor-Leste



## Estefina Wonar

Papua, Indonesia

“The community knew the things I went through. There was discrimination from people to me if any RESPEK fund aid was given to the neighbourhood.”

## Lisa Fitriana

Aceh, Indonesia

“When I was 13, my family and I experienced violence from TNI (Indonesian military forces). Then my father was also violent to his children and my mother.”



## Maria Luisa do Rego

Baucau, Timor-Leste

“My life was never calm because I was often the target of intimidation and threats from one of my neighbours over land disputes.”

“The militia put me through sexual violence. After that, my husband left me when I was seven months pregnant.”

## Agripina Soares

Ainaro, Timor-Leste





“At the same time, I learnt that my husband was not there to support me I felt pain even though there were other people who came and visit me in prison.”

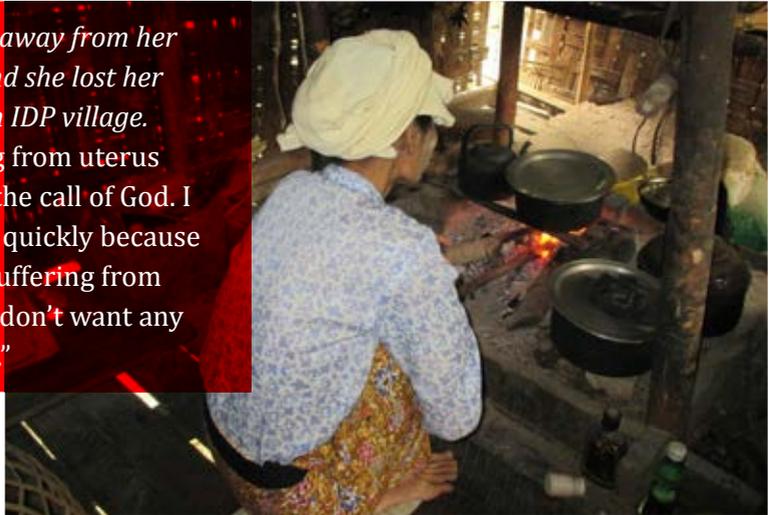
## Tin Tin Cho

Yangon, Myanmar

*Nyar Hto Tue had to run away from her village during the war and she lost her properties. She lives in an IDP village. “Now I am now suffering from uterus cancer. I am waiting for the call of God. I wish he will take my life quickly because I cannot endure all the suffering from my body anymore. But I don’t want any woman to suffer like me.”*

## Nyar Hto Tue

Karen, Myanmar



## Ma Bu

Kachin, Myanmar

“Now I feel a little bit used to this IDP camp and I can go back to check my farm, but now what is going to happen if I have to move to the IDP camp again?”

# Victims remain invisible to health providers. They are unable to access basic health services, and need specialized programmes to deal with trauma, reproductive health and aging.

# 10

In all three countries, the research showed that access to adequate health services is extremely difficult or non-existent, in rural areas as well as in the cities, either because they are not accessible or not affordable. **Timor-Leste** is an exception as health care is free. However, many victims lack understanding about their health needs and have difficulty reaching health services.

However, reproductive health care and education remained scant in all three countries. For most victims of sexual assault, including those who have engaged with the truth commission and court, their reproductive health needs have been ignored. There is little mental health services, including peer to peer support for trauma. Women victims have no opportunities to talk about the violations they endured and their suffering, and trauma is often repressed rather than dealt with, in particular as it impacts the whole community and society around them.

In rural ethnic areas in **Myanmar**, many people die of common health issues, such as disease resulting from snakebites, because of poor conditions of living and lack of access to basic health services.

In **Indonesia**, only 5 out of the 60 women victims have been able to access government-funded hospital visits under a short-term medical assistance program for victims from the national institute for victim and witness protection.



## Saudah

Aceh, Indonesia

“I experienced violence in all over my body. My heart is still in pain, it has not healed until now. Sometimes blood comes out, my chest hurts and I cannot breath. When I remember the incident, I feel hurt and angry. Why did they treat us with so little humanity.”



“My hands and feet often feel sick. My heart has also yet to heal from the violence I experienced. I don't know when I will get better.”

## Martince Anes

Papua, Indonesia



## Lasinem

Buru Island, Indonesia

“I'm still wounded because I remember things that happened in the past... There is still a wound in my heart.”

"I can't weave "tais" because my hands are damaged from being tied up by the militia in the past. My house is like a pig-sty."

**Ana Paula  
Maria P. Soares**

Ainaro, Timor-Leste



**Paulina da Costa**

Baucau, Timor-Leste

"Now I am old, I'm ill, I forget lots of things. I don't go and get medicine because I don't have any money. I just suffer at home."

"I can't do any heavy work. I gave birth to my children but I suffered. I had to stay in my bed for six or seven months."

**Celestina de Lima**

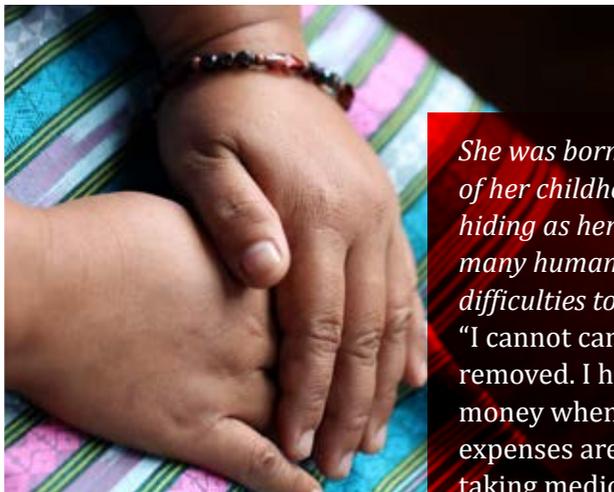
Ainaro, Timor-Leste



"I was beaten with the stick, so now I have the left thigh and hip that feel pain, because of that my knee also has a problem."

## Cho Cho Aye

Yangon, Myanmar



## Nyar Eh Khu

Karen, Myanmar

*She was born in the jungle and had to spend most of her childhood living in difficult conditions in hiding as her parents were rebels. She witnessed many human rights violations. Since then, she had difficulties to survive.*

*"I cannot carry heavy since I had my ovaries removed. I have to spend large amounts of money when I go to the clinic. The income and expenses are not in balance. Lately, I had to stop taking medication for two months, in order to pay for my child schooling."*

"I was tortured at the interrogation center by sinking my body into water. After that I became scared of water."

## Mar Mar Oo

Yangon, Myanmar



# Suffering human rights violations may contribute to poverty. Widows, women who lost their offspring or were childless, and single mothers need special assistance to be able to overcome the economic impact of the violations.

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The legacies of mistreatment that affect women's daily lives, and especially their economic welfare, include physical and mental harm caused by their torture and mistreatment. Many women reported pain and disability that interfered with their ability to pursue what small livelihood opportunities are available to them, mainly agricultural labor.

Our research showed that there is a risk that the next generation may be disadvantaged as they face discrimination, difficulties accessing education and lack resources that can support social mobility. The majority of women victims articulated their first priority was to provide education for their children and grandchildren. This continues to be a major challenge for most of the women involved in the research.

Given the high reliance on farming in ethnic rural areas in **Myanmar**, losing a husband or a son means a degradation of capacities of subsistence. Displacement and fighting have destroyed the means of livelihood of women living in conflict or post-conflict areas (18 out of the 19 women living as IDPs involved in the research are relying on small farming and aid for their livelihood). For women ex-political prisoners, their imprisonment and continuous harassment by the authorities have also in most cases meant losing their sources of livelihood and their properties.

## Jauhari

Aceh, Indonesia

"I went to work as a domestic labourer in Malaysia so that my children wouldn't have to starve and could live in a decent house. When I was working there I was treated badly. All of my suffering was caused by this conflict."



"I sell satays and curry in the Prambanan Market. The limits on my capital means the proceeds are only just enough to live off."

## Sumilah

Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## Darni

Aceh, Indonesia

"I am the backbone of my family. I still have unpaid debts, debts for my bribe so I could get out of jail when I was accused of being part of GAM."





"I have to live alone with four children. We live off our crops. It's very hard to find money."

## Agripina dos Santos

Bobonaro, Timor-Leste

*Pee Pee's village was attacked by the Burma army and her house was burned and looted. She was displaced several times and had difficulty surviving as her husband passed away.*

"After my husband passed away I had to struggle alone with my six children. As a woman I faced many problems and working in the farm every day I got serious injuries from working hard. However, I did not give up for the future of my children."

## Pee Pee

Karen, Myanmar



"I support my children who are all still little. My younger siblings help me, but I can't depend on them for my livelihood."

## Hermina da Costa

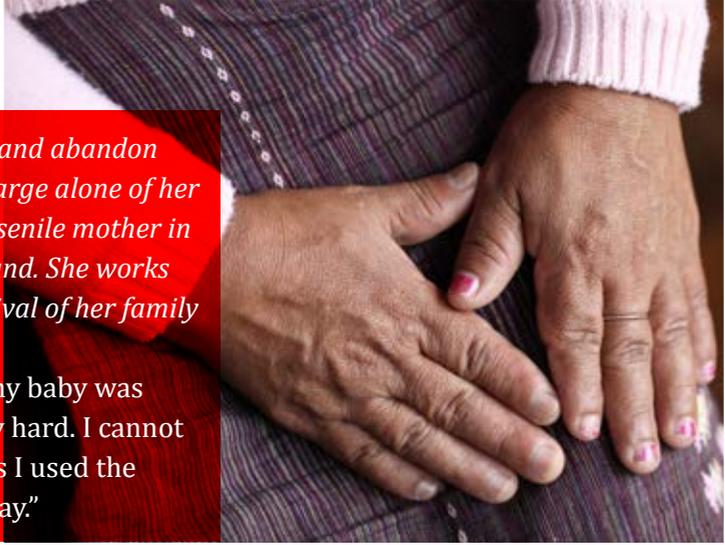
Baucau, Timor-Leste

## Ma Htu

Kachin, Myanmar

*Ma Htu had to flee fighting and abandon her house while being in charge alone of her young children and her old senile mother in law, after she lost her husband. She works extremely hard for the survival of her family in the IDP camp.*

*“When my husband died, my baby was still very young. It was very hard. I cannot remember how many times I used the baby bottle in the wrong way.”*



## Filomena de Fatima

Baucau, Timor-Leste

*“I sell snacks in front of the school to pay for my children’s schooling. My house is damaged and I have no money to repair it.”*

## Ma Hka

Kachin, Myanmar

*“I will never forget my son. He was very good boy, kind and supportive to our family. He worked hard for the family and we also depend on his income.”*



## For women who are refugees or displaced, adequate housing and land ownership are key elements to their security. Displacement disrupts livelihood, long-term displacement disrupts life.

Women interned in the camps, or who suffered restricted movement during periods of conflict, found their ability to pursue farming livelihoods severely impaired, further eroding food security for those already weakened by hunger and illness. Many subsisted on leaves, roots, unripe fruits, and bark they could forage from the forest. In **Papua, Aceh, and Timor-Leste** during periods of backlash against the independence movement, the Indonesian military inflicted collective punishment on communities that it believed supported the resistance by destroying gardens and killing livestock. If women wanted to tend their rice fields or gardens they were required to have a travel permit.

Following the referendum in **Timor-Leste**, hundreds of thousands of Timorese were forcibly deported to refugee camps in West Timor. Women uniformly reported that they went because Indonesian government told them this move was only temporary and that they would be provided with housing and food. Many said they brought only the clothes on their backs and often were separated from relatives who stayed behind. Many have never seen these relatives again. Most of the refugees came from villages whose leadership supported unity with Indonesia or families who had employment in the occupation government or the loyalist militia (whether voluntary or coerced).

In **Myanmar**, our research has shown that being allowed to return to their villages of origin in safe and sustainable conditions is overwhelmingly the first demand of women who have been forced into displacement. In the ethnic conflict or post-conflict zones, return in their home villages is seen by the women who participated in the research as

necessary for:

- **Safety:** living in their communities would provide more security and safety in their everyday life than living in camps or IDP villages where they are fragile and exposed
- **Livelihood:** return would allow them to rely on their usual sources of livelihood, in particular farming, and to develop businesses, which they are not able to do in situations of displacement
- **Access to land:** returning in their original villages would give them relative security in terms of access to land, which is necessary for livelihood
- **Adequate housing:** it would allow them to secure more adequate housing for their families than what they have access to in situations of displacement
- **Travel:** the return to a peaceful and stable situation would mean freedom to travel, which is necessary for social links and livelihood opportunities

However, displaced populations have no prospects for safe return in the near future, and access to their original land might be problematic if and when they are allowed to go back. Out of the 19 women IDPs involved in the research, 12 indicated they do not own a land or a house, while 6 have land or houses, which are in conflict zones thus not accessible. Only 2 stated having access to their own land or house.



“We lived in a camp, with all that suffering. We have no home or land; we just use government land for our crops.”

## Olandina da Silva

Kupang, Indonesia

“Now our land has been claimed by people here even though my husband had ever made it clear which land was ours and which was owned by the people in the neighbourhood. So, if they take my land, where should I go?”

## Ngabinem

Buru Island, Indonesia



“[When] we arrived as refugees, they (the locals) gave us a bit of land to plant, so we could buy a kilo of rice. [At the time], we had no food, so we chopped down banana trees, sliced them up thinly and boiled them to eat.”

## Mariana

Kupang, Indonesia

## Antonia das Neves

Baucau, Timor-Leste

“My family and I occupy land owned by the government. Now the government has ordered us out of our house.”



## Ana Paula S. Ximenes

Bobonaro, Timor-Leste

“My husband’s family always ridicules me and insults me. I have no right to own land because I am a daughter-in-law.”

## Victoria dos Santos

Bobonaro, Timor-Leste

“Our life is still hard; the house isn’t in a condition fit to live in. At night, my children go to other people’s houses to sleep.”





“My hope for the future is I hope to go back to my village. If we can live there again, I believe like this. We do not have home in others’ village as they made us leave. I hope those who drove us out from our village would build proper houses for us, and I wish we have our church, our school and hospital.”

**Nyar Si**

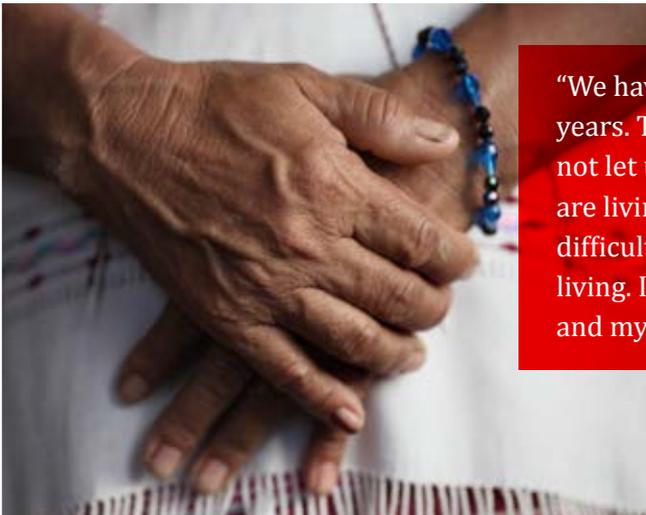
Karen, Myanmar

“It’s been 39 years. It’s 39 years and we still hope to go back. As we had to relocate like this, our economy is not well. We have difficulties. We do not have our own house and we live in others’ compound. Some people love us but some do not. We could not afford to buy a piece of land.”



**Htoo Htoo**

Karen, Myanmar



“We have been displaced for about 40 years. The Burmese government does not let us go back to our village. We are living on someone’s land. It is very difficult for us as we cannot earn our living. I want to go back to my village and my land and do livelihood freely.”

**Nyar Bwe**

Karen, Myanmar

# Recommendations

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Women survivors have suffered immensely yet also possess deep wellsprings of strength and resourcefulness. We who wish to help lessen the burden of these women should readjust our approach to better serve their needs and aspirations for truth, justice, healing.

### **Justice cannot be achieved without addressing social and economic vulnerability of women victims**

#### *Building Solidarity*

Women's support groups, such as ones established during this action research, can be used to build permanent sharing and learning circles where victims can not only find mutual psychological support, but also share information about opportunities, act as platforms for knowledge and training, and band together to increase influence in advocating for their needs.

#### *Access to Knowledge*

Learning circles can be used as a structure to disseminate agricultural knowledge on different crop varieties resistant to pests and climate problems, low-cost organic farming techniques, or information on pesticide safety and where to access low cost fertilizers.

Many women expressed their aspirations for the future to be expanding their livelihood to include entrepreneurship and home industry. These pursuits are especially needed as women age, for those who are physically unable to do farm labor, or for women in urban settings. However, as noted above, undertaking such livelihoods requires training in skills development and market research and small business development. Access to up-to-date market information can also be shared through the learning circle through such tools as a cellphone SMS service that provides updates on market prices, product demand, and transportation conditions.

#### *Access to Capital*

A majority of women voiced a desire for access to funds so they could open a small business. The victims learning circle could easily act as a micro-lending groups through non-profit credit unions that are expanding through Indonesia. Micro-credit groups function by all the members acting as guarantors to all the other members loans, and so are dependent on mutual trust and support for success. Such a group would not only help meet the need for access to capital but at the same time could help to further build solidarity among women victims and a small business learning network where

successes and lessons learned can be shared. There are numerous examples throughout the world of women's groups, even those with no schooling, achieving high levels of success in loan repayment and business success through these types of microcredit groups.

### *Restoring Citizenship*

Perhaps most pressing both in order to meet basic needs as well as to build women's trust in the legitimacy of their government is to restore their status as citizens. Being a citizen means removing barriers to basic citizenship documents such as ID cards, marriage and birth certificates, non-discriminatory practice in hiring for government positions and access to government benefits such as scholarships, housing and poverty assistance, and basic services such as education and health care.

### *Prioritizing Victims*

Many women also voiced their desire for assistance, not just because of their dire economic circumstances, but because of their experience as victims. Provision of services and benefits should prioritize victims, not only because they are among the most vulnerable, but in order to provide them with the healing that comes with recognition by their government of their suffering. This requires more widespread efforts to identify victims and their needs, and assess their barriers to obtaining assistance and how these barriers can be overcome. Establishing victim-focused units in government agencies and civil society networks, could help to channel information to victims learning circles about training, benefit opportunities, provide assistance with the forms and procedures necessary to access services.

## **Inclusive and sustainable peace is a prerequisite for justice**

### *Ending violence*

In supporting countries to transition out of conflict, primary focus must be kept on the protection of women: this means an immediate halt to all forms of violence, resulting either from fighting or from other forms of state violence, which has an impact on them. End of violence must include sustainable solutions and rely on long-term political agreements that take into consideration the rights and needs of women survivors and address the root causes of conflict and violence. Creating the conditions for the safe return of displaced and refugees must be a priority.

### *Including women*

Women survivors can and must play a central role in peace negotiations and post-conflict political processes. Support groups and learning circles such as mentioned above are an opportunity to keep women informed of political developments that affect them and empower them to identify and advocate for their own demands and priorities in terms of peace building. Women survivors must also be an integral part of designing programmes aimed at addressing the impact of conflict on them.

### *Providing a safe space for accessing justice*

Ending violence needs to include building a safe space around women survivors in order to strengthen and support them in seeking justice and overcoming the obstacles they face. This means allocating sufficient efforts and resources in legal assistance and support programmes at the local level, and helping survivors and their communities build their knowledge and understanding of their rights.

These elements together could help to empower women victims/survivors to identify and advocate for their own needs and priorities, and address both the impacts of their suffering as well as the roots that caused it.

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