

The present report reflects the outcomes of a series of consultations with civil society organizations that support victims of sexual and gender-based violence linked to terrorism, which were convened by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) in March 2024. Participants also provided inputs via a written survey.

The findings of this report do not necessarily represent the views or official positions of CTED, the Counter-Terrorism Committee, or any Committee member.

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I. Introduction

The present report is based on consultations with more than 40 representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) that support victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in 16 United Nations

The Security Council has recognized the multiple ways in which SGBV is used by terrorist groups to advance their strategic objectives and ideology and as an instrument to increase their power by supporting financing, recruitment, and destruction of communities. Across its women, peace and security and counter-terrorism agendas, the Security Council has called for a number of measures to address the linkages between terrorism, human trafficking and SGBV, from countering the financing of terrorism and advancing criminal justice responses to ensuring victims' access to support, recognition and redress through a survivor-centred approach.² Furthermore, the Secretary-General has repeatedly underscored the need for efforts to prevent and address SGBV to be closely

and strategically aligned with efforts to prevent violent extremism.

The efforts of CSOs range from, inter alia, providing immediate and long-term medical and psychosocial support, documenting violations, advocating inclusive access to justice and reparations, supporting reintegration into communities, to, when relevant, informing the development and implementation of transitional justice processes through consultative and survivor-centred approaches. As such, CSOs play a critical role in advancing a comprehensive approach to SGBV in terrorism contexts, which is premised on the needs and experiences of victims and affected communities.

² This includes five dedicated resolutions on sexual violence in conflict (resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013) and 2467 (2019)).

II. Sexual and gender-based violence linked to terrorism: Definition and manifestations

As noted by CTED in its previous publication, *Towards Meaningful Accountability for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Linked to Terrorism*, the phrase “SGBV linked to terrorism” aims to reflect the multifaceted and evolving understanding of the different ways in which SGBV can be perpetrated by terrorist groups or individuals, in armed conflict or non-conflict settings, and which may warrant the application of different legal frameworks.”³

The CSO representatives highlighted that SGBV linked to terrorism can take different forms. Such violence currently occurs both in armed conflict and non-conflict situations. Among the forms of sexual violence used by terrorist groups, participants identified rape (72.5 per cent), sexual abuse (67.5 per cent), and forced marriage (55 per cent) as the most prevalent forms they have encountered in their work with victims. Participants also noted the use of sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, human trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced nudity, forced prostitution, and enforced sterilization or forced abortion among the tactics used in terrorist contexts.⁴

The CSOs emphasized that SGBV is not always sexual in nature and that more efforts were needed to address the full range of violence and gendered harms



“Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a collective term that comprises two overarching notions. The first is sexual violence, which is a form of gender-based violence. It includes any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. Sexual violence can take multiple forms, including rape, sexual abuse, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, forced abortion, forced prostitution, sexual enslavement, forced circumcision, castration, and forced nudity. The second notion is gender-based violence, which is an umbrella term for any harmful act directed against individuals or groups of individuals, such as women, men, girls, boys and LGBTQI+ persons, on the basis of their gender. It includes acts and omissions that inflict physical, nonphysical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Gender-based violence therefore also entails acts which are not sexual in nature, including certain forms of domestic violence, or the killing of individuals or groups on the basis of their gender (e.g., femicide). It is rooted in gender inequality and the abuse of power.”¹

³ CTED, *Towards Meaningful Accountability for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Linked to Terrorism*, November 2023, p. 8.

⁴ NB: The percentages in this report refer to the percentages of CSOs that reported on a topic, rather than the percentages of incidence of the different forms of SGBV mentioned.

Impact on victims and survivors

The effects of SGBV on victims and communities are devastating. CSOs described the horrific and often long-lasting physical, emotional and psychological trauma experienced by victims and survivors of SGBV linked to terrorism. This impact is further aggravated in situations of armed conflict, where multiple and overlapping forms of violence and trauma often coexist. Across different regional contexts, participants highlighted the particular vulnerabilities of victims in situations of displacement, where they often lack access to basic services, including shelter, health care, education and civil documentation, making it especially difficult to access necessary support and obtain reparation. In addition, they are vulnerable to SGBV in displacement camps, often perpetrated by security forces, and thus repeat victimization.

III. The role of civil society organizations in advancing a survivor-centred approach

A victim/survivor-centred approach “places the rights, wishes, needs, safety, dignity and well-being of the victim/survivor at the centre of all prevention and response measures.”¹¹ In resolution 2467 (2019), the Security Council calls for a survivor-centred approach in preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict.¹² In this regard, the Council calls for a more holistic understanding of justice and accountability, which includes the provision of reparations for survivors as well as livelihood support to enable them to rebuild their lives and support their families, including the children born of sexual violence in conflict who are also stigmatized, often stateless, and acutely vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization by armed groups.¹³ It also recognizes the necessity, in all prevention and response efforts, to support a broad range of civil society actors who are on the front lines of conflicts.¹⁴

¹¹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, “IASC Definition & Principles of a Victim/Survivor Centered Approach”, https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2023-06/IASC%20Definition%20%26%20Principles%20of%20a%20Victim_Sur%20Centered%20Approac.pdf.

¹² Operative para. 16.

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While many of the CSOs consulted by CTED have been pivotal in advancing a survivor-centred approach to responding and preventing SGBV linked to terrorism in their regional and local contexts, they are also outspoken about the challenges they continue to encounter in their work. In this regard, the CSOs perceived State authorities as prioritizing securitized counter-terrorism approaches at the expense of centring the rights and needs of survivors. They stated that greater awareness was needed among law enforcement, the judiciary and other relevant State authorities of how to ensure a holistic and gender-sensitive

approach to responding to SGBV linked to terrorism. In this context, CSOs identified the lack of political will to prioritize the prevention and response to

representative of a CSO mentioned that women who were abducted and forcibly married to Boko Haram members are being referred to as “Boko Haram” when they return to their communities after having escaped or been liberated from captivity. They are often perceived not as victims but as a risk to the community. In some cases, victims need to be reinserted into new communities to avoid stigma in their own communities.

Particular challenges arise for the reintegration of children born of rape. When the children of women and girls abducted by terrorist groups return, they are considered “bad blood” and rejected by the community.¹⁶ The lack of documentation for these children further compounds the situation and may prevent children from getting access to any type of support or reparation. Their resultant exclusion from education and care systems as a child can lead to long-term vulnerability and marginalization in adult life.

under the control of terrorist groups, as well as for survivors who have been displaced and for whom official documentation may have been lost or stolen, and for orphan children who do not have legal guardians. "While justice is a priority, we cannot realistically expect survivors to come forward, when they lack everything and are living in temporary shelters", said a civil society representative. Moreover, survivors hesitate to file complaints due to the taboo and stigma surrounding sexual violence, which lead to fear and mistrust

Therefore, CSOs named as a priority the promotion of guidelines for the collection and preservation of digital evidence.

CSOs also highlighted that victims of online SGBV often mistrust State authorities.

This mistrust is partly owing to the perception that authorities are incapable of effectively responding to online SGBV, as well as a perception of sexism within State institutions. The high cost associated with legal proceedings constitutes a further obstacle mentioned by the CSOs.

IV. Reparation

Reparation forms an essential element of justice and victims' rights. The importance of reparation has been recognized by the Security Council, which states that survivors "should benefit from relief and recovery programmes, including health care, psychosocial care, safe shelter, livelihood support and legal aid and that services should include provision for women with children born as a result of sexual violence in conflict, as well as men and boys who may have been victims of sexual violence in conflict".²⁴

A key element of reparation is that it should be proportional to the gravity of the violations and the harm suffered. Comprehensive programmes may include all or some variation of individual, collective, symbolic, and material reparations, as well as priority access to services. Reparations have the potential to be transformative and to assist in overcoming structures of inequality and discrimination.²⁵

Victims and CSOs should be consulted on the design and implementation of relevant reparation measures to give agency, ownership and empowerment to affected individuals and their communities.

CSOs highlighted that a solid legal framework must underpin reparation programmes to ensure legal certainty, define parameters, and provide sustainability and that adequate resource allocation must guarantee their implementation. In this regard, CSOs further noted the need to favour a lower and more flexible standard of proof in the context of reparation programmes for victims of SGBV to avoid placing undue burden on victims.²⁶ This can include the establishment of collective compensation schemes for groups, instead of individuals (which can be both burdensome and costly). Moreover, compensation should not be dependent on the favourable conclusion of a criminal justice process.

²⁴ Security Council resolution 2467 (2019), operative para. 28.

²⁵ United Nations, Guidance note of the Secretary General on reparations for conflict related sexual violence, June 2014. Available at www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Press/GuidanceNoteReparationsJune-2014.pdf.

²⁶ Ibid.

As previously noted by CTED, civil society initiatives, such as the Global Survivors Fund, play a crucial role in assisting victims, including victims of SGBV linked to terrorism, with interim reparative measures when States are unable to fulfil their responsibilities to provide reparations to victims of terrorism.²⁷

While States remain duty bearers, such initiatives aid in envisioning and implementing effective reparative programmes.

The Global Survivors Fund also offers technical assistance to States to develop their own reparation programmes.

Some current examples of reparation schemes for victims of SGBV include the Yazidi Survivor Law in Iraq and the *Fonds national de réparations des victimes de violences sexuelles liées aux conflits armés* (National Fund for the Reparation of Victims of Sexual Violence Linked to Armed Conflicts).

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