



16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE
16 DÍAS DE ACTIVISMO CONTRA LA VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO
16 JOURS D'ACTIVISME CONTRE LA VIOLENCE DE GENRE
25 NOV - 10 DEC <http://16dayscwgl.rutgers.edu>



INFORMATION SHEET #5

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence by State Agents - Even in places where there is no recognized conflict, militarized violence against civilians by uniformed personnel, such as the police, military, prison guards, takes place. Militarism tends to privilege a particular form of aggressive masculinity, and within this context sexual violence is one tool that is used to assert power over others. Women and men who do not conform to particular traditional gender roles may experience specific forms of sexualized harassment and violence. For example, during the protests in Egypt, the military rounded up a number of female protestors and subjected them to degrading “virginity tests” and threatened them with prostitution charges ([visit Amnesty International's site for more information](#)). Additional examples of sexual and gender-based violence by state agents include: high rates of sexual violence within the military, threats by police to women reporting cases of violence or assault, violations committed by peacekeeping forces, and violence against women living and working around military bases.

While many argue that the men who perpetrate gender based violence are simply ‘bad individuals’ acting on their own, the examples above point to the ways in which such violence is implicated in specific social, political and security systems and processes. In addition to the culture of violence in which uniformed personnel may be trained, pervasive impunity and lack of accountability are major barriers to the true safety and security of civilians, and women and girls therein. Militaries have their own, separate justice codes and courts, often making it difficult for civilian victims to seek and obtain justice. Lack of political will to investigate and address violations can also result in impunity for perpetrators. Other individuals in positions of authority may believe they can commit crimes because they are ‘above the law.’ Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between violence by state agents and state-encouraged violence by perceived non-state actors. Governments may also use private security companies, proxy militias, and hired paramilitaries to act out violence and avoid responsibility for attacks on civilians.

The police and military have a prominent, although complicated, role in how many of us understand safety and security. We often turn to them as a way of responding to crimes and disasters, stabilizing conflict situations, or accessing justice systems. Sometimes these state agents may act against civilians, either upon government orders or because they are able to commit crimes with impunity. The state, using the police or military, has the ability to inflict violence and intimidation on a far greater scale than individual actors. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize that the state must be responsible to its people, that state agents must be held accountable for any violations, and that the ‘security sector’ should be guided by human rights principles. Beginning at the community-level, we must consider what truly makes us feel safe and begin to imagine ‘security’ alternatives. By sharing these ideas and supporting one another, perhaps we can be the catalysts for global changes that lead to real safety and security for everyone. As part of this year’s 16 Days Campaign, we encourage you to share your thoughts about what security means to you (<http://16dayscwgl.rutgers.edu/2011-campaign/qwhat-is-securityq-submissions>)!

Valentina’s Account

Barranca Bejuco, Mexico

On 16 February [2002], at a stream where I was washing clothes, I was about to finish when I heard some noise. Eight members of the armed forces came out; some of them asked me where were the “hooded men” [allegedly guerrilla members]; six of them surrounded me and I stayed in front of two of them. One of them pointed at me with his weapon and threatened to shoot at me. He showed me a picture and asked me whether I knew that person. He showed me a list with eleven names and asked me whether I knew them; angrily, he demanded how it was possible that I did not know them. I answered I did not. The same soldier punched me in my abdomen; I fall and fainted. After that, another soldier pulled my hair and said they were going to kill all of them. I did not want to say anything; I was too scared they were going to kill me. He grabbed me strongly and asked me again; one of them came on top of me and abused me, while the other 6 men laughed about it. Two of them abused me, I was surrounded by the other soldiers so I could not escape; this is a place where nobody is around. When they finished abusing me, I could run away. I went home, I was beaten and crying. My husband came home, he had been working; when he got there he asked me what happened, I answered I was abused by some members of the armed forces.

To watch a video testimony from Valentina, please visit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXxiOvYL20-c>

Suggested Actions

- **Participate:** CWGL is asking groups and individuals to participate in a project for the international 16 Days Campaign that asks “What does security mean to you?” Create a 30-second video, post it on YouTube or another video hosting site, and submit the link to CWGL on the 16 Days website. You can also send us short written statements at the same link. To collect thoughts and ideas from your community, host a dialogue to brainstorm about what makes people feel insecure and come up with collective solutions for safer communities.
- **Investigate:** Research the rules that govern your country’s military and the type of justice system in place to deal with any violations of those rules. What happens if a military service member commits a crime against a civilian-male and female? What are the rates of domestic violence in military families, and how do they compare to national statistics? Is there a system for reporting sexual violence within the military? Share your findings with women’s rights, human rights and peace organizations near you.
- **Network:** If state agents are known as regular perpetrators of violence against civilians where you are, reach out to other women’s rights, peace and human rights organizations in your community or country to discuss possible avenues to increase transparency and government accountability. Countries that have signed on to human rights treaties and covenants are legally bound to protect the rights of their peoples. Consider reaching out to international networks that can help you name and shame perpetrators.
- **Find positive role models:** Ask former members of the military who are sympathetic to your work to serve as positive role models for current service members. Prior to deploying troops or peacekeepers, create empathy for women and girls by sharing women’s experiences of violence at the hands of state agents.
- **Dialogue:** Are there any female police officers or soldiers in your community? If so, what was/is their training like? What kinds of jobs do they do? Invite them for a conversation about women’s participation and how to engage in security sector reform and gender-aware trainings.

Resources

- Adelman, Madelaine. (2003) “The Military, Militarism, and the Militarization of Domestic Violence.” in *Violence Against Women* Vol 9. No 1118. Available online: <http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/9/9/1118>
- Bastick, Megan and Kristin Valasek. (2008) *Gender & Security Sector Reform Toolkit*. Produced by DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, and UN-INSTRAW. Available online from: <http://www.dcaf.ch/gender-security-sector-reform/index.cfm?navsub1=37&nav1=3>
- Bunch, Charlotte. (March 2004) “A Feminist Human Rights Lens on Human Security.” in *Peace Review*. Available online: <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/charlotte/humansecurity.pdf>
- Hans, Asha and Betty A. Reardon. (2010) *The Gender Imperative: Human Security vs. State Security*. <http://www.taylorandfrancis.com/books/details/9780415585774/>
- Moon, Katharine H.S. (1997) *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S. – Korea Relations*. Excerpts available from Google Books: http://books.google.com/books?id=trvxvL3_yyWC

Websites

- Democratic Control of the Armed Forces: <http://www.dcaf.ch/>
- Human Rights First: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/>
- Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/>
- Women Human Rights Defenders: <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/>