



# VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY STATE ACTORS

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED 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>



By Nazra for Feminist Studies and Center for Women's Global Leadership

**Sexual and Gender-Based Violence by State Actors:** Violence by state actors, against civilians occurs during violent conflict and relative peace. The culture of militarism employs the use of violence to settle disputes and enforce political and economic interests. States justify the increase of militarism in various ways in different regions. Despite this variety, militarism privileges only violent forms of masculinity, and negatively influences the security and human rights of women, children, and men. Sexual and gender-based violence by State actors happens in public and private spaces, in prisons and police custody, in the military and around military bases, and by peacekeepers, paramilitaries, militias, and private-for-hire groups. States will use non-state actors to commit violence against human rights defenders and other civilians, thereby ensuring impunity from prosecution and punishment.

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Tahrir Square in Egypt, those targeted by security forces based on their sexual orientation and gender identity in Honduras, Tanzania, Uganda (among other places), journalists who report on government corruption and criminality, indigenous and other activists who advocate for land, language, economic, and other human rights are all vulnerable in the face of impunity enjoyed by State actors.

The lack of State accountability and rampant impunity for sexual crimes, and the role of police and other security forces as perpetrators rather than protectors serve to intimidate women and other attacked groups from reporting violations or seeking justice. The patterns of violence used by State actors illustrate the gendered violations activists often face in their work. Human rights activists, especially WHRDs, who challenge gender roles and social behaviors, religious hegemony, economic exploitation, and stand up for economic opportunities, education, and basic human rights standards face extreme insecurity, including sexual violence and death. WHRDs meet the same challenges as their men counterparts, such as beatings or imprisonment, as well as violations that stem from their identity as women, such as sexuality baiting, sexual harassment, or sexual assault. In many countries around the world, women are expected to remain in the home and away from politics and social activism. When they refuse to conform to set gender roles, WHRDs are at a critical risk for certain forms of violence and restrictions exacerbated due to their gender and their activism on political, economic, and social issues in the public space. They are also more vulnerable to social prejudice and public denunciation, especially when advocating for women's rights.

Pervasive militarism and impunity must be addressed and must end in order for human rights of all people to flourish. States must be held accountable by national, regional and international mechanisms in their responsibility to investigate, prosecute, and punish perpetrators. State actors, including police and military, must be held responsible for the crimes they commit and States must protect and prevent violence against civilians, including targeted groups like WHRDs, other human rights defenders, journalists, and indigenous communities.

**Ghada's Story, Egypt:** Ghada recounts her assault by soldiers in December 2011: "[...] one soldier said, 'Get her—that is the one who has been cursing all day. We want her.' He grabbed me by the hair, in an incredibly painful way. He started swearing at him and threatening me. Then began the kicking and beating, with sticks—there must have been around ten soldiers hitting me all at once. [...] One of the masked men that had been outside was now in there[...] He said, 'I was the one outside, with my face covered.' [...] He said, 'Aren't you the one who was swearing at us? Today I will show you whether or not I am a man. Tonight I will have a party just for you.' He said 'I am a Sa'idi [from Upper Egypt], I will not let you go, you are not getting out of here. Today, that is it, you are mine.' And indeed, he actually made it a point to everyone else standing around, that I was his... He slapped me across the face [...]" (Continued)

## Suggested Actions

**Tell Us:** What does it take for you to feel secure? Submit your thoughts: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/cwglsecurityproject> and learn more: <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/program-areas/gender-based-violence/security-project>. You can also check out the “Security Project” information sheet in the 2013 Take Action Kit.

**Advocate for an end to impunity:** Engage with policymakers who are willing to listen and who work at the local, national, United Nations and other influential levels to make ending gender-based violence a priority and success marker for national development. Document and publicize instances of violations against human rights defenders, journalists, indigenous and marginalized groups. Share information about violations of human rights of targeted groups locally and internationally, and demand justice from influential governments, regional and international governmental and justice mechanisms.

**Build Awareness:** Write about the way prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and the ways survivors, communities, and State actors are or aren't addressing the issues. Write to bring local and international awareness and force the stigma of sexual violence and gender-based violence out of the shadows. Speak to the traditional media (newspapers, radio, and television) and use social media (Facebook and Twitter) to inform ordinary people at the local and international levels about the realities women human rights defenders and other rights activists are facing in your area.

**Strengthen the Work of Women Human Rights Defenders:** Bring your community and surrounding communities through conversation on women's human rights and the use of sexual violence and gender-based violence against activists and mobilize all to demand accountability from State perpetrators through national, regional, and international mechanisms. Approach these communities to collectively stand behind these activists in the face of State and non-state violence. Strengthen the work of WHRDs through improved communication, information sharing, and documentation of instances of violations at the national, regional, and international levels. Men can play a role in supporting the end to sexual violence and gender-based violence against women activists by State actors by simply being present during marches, demonstrations, and other public activities. Help men hesitant to join see that they and the society they live in will benefit from an end sexual and gender-based violence by individuals, groups, and State actors.

(Continued) A respectable general came in, dressed in a suit [...] The masked soldier suddenly took the general aside and spoke to him privately. After they spoke, the general completely ignored me, and the soldier returned to threatening me [...] Then Dr. Ziyad came in, from the field hospital, to take everyone out— [...]but the soldier said, “No – this one, she will not leave.”

So the doctor persisted and decided to speak to the general. He told him, “I am not leaving without all of them,” and the general of course reassured him, saying “Of course, they will all get out.” It became clear that it was a political charade— people needed to get out, that's it. So the doctor told the soldier that his superior, the general, said everyone should be let go. And so the soldier told me, “No problem, you will get out, but I am going to shoot you.” A clear, sound threat in front of everyone, that “if I find you outside the gates, I will shoot you. I am a Sa'idi, and I will not let you go.”

Excerpt from *Jadaliyya*. “Ghada's Testimony on Being Tortured by the Egyptian Army” 18 December 2011. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3599/ghadas-testimony-on-being-tortured-by-the-egyptian>

## Resources

- Center for Economic and Social Rights: <http://www.cesr.org/index.php>
- Day to End Impunity: <http://daytoendimpunity.org>
- Enloe, Cynthia. (2007) *Globalization & Militarism: Feminists Make the Link*. <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9780742541115>
- ESCR-NET: <http://www.escr-net.org>
- Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces: <http://www.dcaf.ch>
- Hans, Asha and Betty A. Reardon. (2010) *The Gender Imperative: Human Security vs. State Security*. <http://www.taylorandfrancis.com/books/details/9780415585774>
- Human Rights First: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org>
- Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org>
- Nazra for Feminist Studies: <http://nazra.org/en>
- Nobel Women's Initiative: <http://nobelwomensinitiative.org>
- United Nations Development Programme. (1994) *New Dimensions of Human Security*. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994>
- Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition: <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org>
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: <http://www.wilpfinternational.org>