

Legal Protection for Victims of Sexual Slavery as A War Crime in Russia and Ukraine

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Abstract

This research discusses the legal protection of victims of sexual slavery as a war crime in Russia and Ukraine. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has resulted in significant violations of international humanitarian law, including sexual violence committed by Russian soldiers. This research explores the legal implications of sexual slavery as a war crime in the context of the ongoing conflict. In this study, the author uses a socio-legal approach to analyze the legal protection of victims of sexual slavery. The results show that the crime of sexual slavery as a war crime in Russia and Ukraine can be understood through the lens of international human rights law. This paper hopes to contribute to the development of human rights law and the protection of victims of sexual slavery as a war crime.

Keywords: Sexual Slavery, Human Rights Law, War Crimes.

A. INTRODUCTION

The existence of disputes between countries that lead to armed conflict continues to increase (Gunawan et al., 2024). This is due to various backgrounds that arise, one of which is that the settlement through diplomatic channels is considered a failure and does not meet the point of peace (Katagiri, 2021). Along with the development of state life and the dynamics of international life, this has triggered war events and countries involved in armed conflict. Armed conflict in its development has resulted in many casualties, such as in Russia and Ukraine (Pereira et al., 2022).

During armed conflict, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to

violence (Shohel, 2023). Women and children are the most vulnerable groups to violence in situations of war and armed conflict (Security Council, 2024). Protection of their right to be safe from violence is not only a moral necessity but also a clear obligation under international law (Mégret & Redaelli, 2022). Data shows that around 80% of war victims are women and children, far exceeding the casualties among the military (Cimino & Degani, 2023). Women and children often become targets of violence, including sexual violence, torture, murder, and forced displacement from their homes. The violence experienced by women and children during war has severe physical, psychological, and social impacts, both individually and communally (Ferrara et al., 2024). Trauma, loss of family, and social stigma can last a lifetime.

The right to be free from violence is a fundamental human right and applies in any situation, including during war (Tapia Tapia, 2024). Protecting this right means preserving the dignity and humanity of the most vulnerable groups (Dicky Eko Prasetyo, Muh. Ali Masnun, Arinto Nugroho, Denial Ikram, 2024). The right to be safe from violence for women and children during war is a fundamental right that must be guaranteed by the state and the international community (Yahyaoui Krivenko, 2024). This protection is crucial to prevent long-lasting negative impacts and ensure that humanitarian values are upheld, even in the most difficult situations.

This extraordinary violence is perpetrated against women and girls in various conflict countries (Jolof et al., 2022). It shows how women and girls, are raped by government forces, non-state actors, local police, and even family members who are supposed to protect them. Women and children have been maimed, sexually mutilated and often later killed or left for dead (Bhutta et al., 2021). Research shows

that women and children are more likely to be victims than men, with the risk increasing 14 times (Kurt & Akin, 2023). There is data stating that 80% of victims are women and children. The percentage of victims of sexual violence certainly has a very large number compared to the number of victims of war caused by military apparatus. In particular, children are one of the parties who are considered not to have the legal capacity to commit criminal acts due to the condition and nature that are still dependent on adults, the level of physical, mental, moral and spiritual development that is not yet mature (Debby Kristin, 2021).

Women experienced violent suffering when subjected to searches, had to undress, were forced to parade or dance naked before the tantara or in public, and performed domestic chores in the nude. Even women and girls were forced into marriages that were actually repeated rape and sexual slavery with the tantara (Jiménez et al., 2023). The discrepancy between the agreement of the international community and the political will of member states to uphold humanitarian principles and human rights law, and to uphold that those who commit rape and gender-based violence, including sexual slavery, are held responsible and must be punished (Kälin & Künzli, 2019).

Human rights cannot be reduced under any circumstances by anyone (non-derogable rights) include the right to life, the right not to be tortured, the right to freedom of person, thought and conscience, the right to religion, the right not to be enslaved, the right to be recognized as a person and equality before the law, and the right not to be prosecuted on the basis of retroactive laws (Prasetio, 2023)(Worluh-Okolie, Nkechinyere Huomachi, Joseph-Asoh, 2024). Human rights are innate, hence they do not require juridical legitimacy to be enacted in a national or international

legal system (Gunawan et al., 2024). Although there is no constitutional protection and guarantee for human rights, they still exist in every human being. This theistic idea of human rights is recognized as the most essential value in human life. However, because most human life systems are secular and positivistic, the existence of human rights requires a juridical foundation to be applied in regulating human life (Ramadhan et al., 2023).

The final report of the DePaul University International Human Rights Law Association estimated that 80% of those sold for sexual exploitation were under the age of 24 (Nuraini, n.d.) . The development of human rights law around the world has been a topical issue in recent years. Ironically, this development has resulted in many cases of human rights killings. International crimes first appeared in international literature in the Nuremberg Peace Declaration (Effendi, 2011). The term was used to indict Nazi leaders for the atrocities they committed against some members of civilian society, including German soldiers during World War II. Although the IMT, IMTFE, CCL10, ICTY, ICTR, and ICC have defined the scope of the human rights movement in various ways, it can be concluded that human rights law refers to inhumane acts. Acts such as murder, treason, and torture, committed as part of a systematic or widespread approach directed against the general population (Nuraini, n.d.).

Sexual slavery can be categorized as part of a systematic or widespread attack, sexual violence can also form part of inhumane acts against groups of people. Torture, sexual slavery, inhumane acts, or persecution may be prosecuted as crimes against humanity under the provisions of persecution, torture, sexual slavery or inhumane acts (Dahris Siregar et al., 2023). Cases of sexual slavery that occurred

during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, based on a statement from Olha Stefanishyna, Prime Minister of Euro-Atlantic Integration, at the Acting for the Victims event in June 2023, recorded cases of sexual violence amounted to at least 208 cases (Stefanishyna, 2023). The report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Inquiry on Ukraine noted that the victims of sexual violence by Russian soldiers were women, men, and children aged 4-82 in nine regions of Ukraine. However, they believe the total number of cases is much higher. This is because victims are reluctant to report for various reasons.

There were various forms of sexual violence committed during the conflict by Russian soldiers, but the most common was rape. Russian soldiers used to go door-to-door to force victims to do as they were told or to stand helplessly by as Russian soldiers sexually assaulted them, such as raping, forcibly stripping, torturing, genital electrocution, and watching other victims being raped or killed in front of them. These crimes have a huge impact on victims physically, psychologically and socially. Many victims experience genital trauma, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, PTSD, depression, suicidal thoughts, humiliation, isolation, humiliation, fear and intimidation, and even domestic violence (Azmi, 2022). Thus, there is no doubt that Russia's use of sexual violence as a military weapon during the conflict aimed to terrorize, degrade, destroy and humiliate Ukrainian citizens.

The issue of violence against women today is not just an individual or national issue, on the contrary, it is a global problem. In the current situation, this can even be said to be a transnational issue (Widyastuti, 2009). It is called a global issue because it is related to human rights issues, which are defined as rights that are inherent and have existed since the beginning of human history and without which

humanity would not be able to live as humans in the world. In short, this set of rules includes political, social, economic and religious rules and regulations.

The legal protection of victims of sexual slavery as a war crime in Russia and Ukraine can be understood through the lens of international human rights law. This paper will explore the legal implications of sexual slavery as a war crime in the context of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. International Humanitarian Law Perspective The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has resulted in significant violations of international humanitarian law. The Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol 1 of 1997 provide protection for civilians and civilian objects in times of war. Russia's armed attack on Ukraine is a violation of this principle, as it has caused harm to civilians and infrastructure (Winaldi & Setiyono, 2022).

According to Daniel Thurer the essence and perspective of international human rights law aims to subject warfare to the rule of law by limiting its destructive impact and reducing human suffering (Thürer, 2007). Wheeler and Thomas state that socio-legal studies are an alternative approach aimed at testing the doctrinal study of law. Therefore researchers who use socio-legal methods use social theory as an analytical goal, researchers do not have the aim of paying special attention to sociology or other social sciences but only to law and its legal studies (Darwanta, 2020). The socio-legal research approach is a combination of approaches that focus on the family of social sciences such as political science, economics, cultural science, history of science, anthropology, communication science, and several other sciences and then combined with approaches used in law, such as the study of principles, doctrines, and the hierarchy of laws and regulations that cover them (Ghaly, 2022).

Furthermore, the socio-legal aspect of the research method has two characteristics, namely: (a) conducting socio-legal studies textual studies through articles on legislation, policies, and judges' studies, decisions can be critically analyzed and explained the meaning and implications of legal subjects (Banakar & Travers, 2014).

This method is used to analyze the relationship between the conditions that occur (*Das sein*) and the existing juridical arrangements (*Das sollen*). This is the relationship that will provide answers and the results of the analysis are of course national law and international law that accommodate the protection of human rights of citizens is part of the comparison and the basis for the formation of ideal concepts. The application of the socio-legal method will certainly encourage results that are in accordance with the analysis, recommendations given, and the ideal concept produced.

B. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Optimizing the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC) as Permanent Judicial Bodies in Sexual Violence Cases.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial body of the United Nations (UN). The ICJ was established under the UN Charter in June 1945 and began its activities in April 1946. The Court has a dual role: first, to resolve, under international law, legally disputes submitted by States (its decisions are binding and non-appealable to the parties concerned); and, second, to provide advisory opinions on questions of law referred to it by official UN bodies and agencies of the system. The ICJ is a body that adjudicates and resolves disputes between member states and also provides advisory opinions to official bodies and specialized agencies under the UN (Braumann, 2023).

Furthermore, the International Criminal Court is an international court established to investigate, try and prosecute persons accused of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole, namely the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. Both of these judicial bodies play their respective roles in terms of providing guarantees of protection in the event of sexual violence that subjects women to violence in the world of war. For the first time in international criminal law, the ICC Statute not only lists rape and forced prostitution, but also mentions several specific crimes against humanity and war crimes namely rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and forced sterilization (Dias, 2018). In addition, it also includes the first explicitly gender-based criminalization of persecution as a crime against humanity which is an important step towards a better gender-sensitive international criminal law framework as stated in Article 6(b) of the ICC statute.

The implementation of sexual violence settlements through the ICC and ICJ has been less than optimal, two decades after their creation, with one conviction overturned on appeal and another currently subject to binding. The ICC has only established one final sentence for sexual crimes. While the success of international tribunals cannot and should not be measured by the number of convictions alone it is clear that the ICC is not achieving its goal of ending impunity for gender crimes under international criminal law as Richard Goldstone and other observers had hoped (Khan et al., 2023). Allegations of sexual assault in cases submitted to the ICC have failed for various reasons at all stages of the process. Not all charges initially investigated and charged in criminal proceedings will result in a conviction that is enforceable at the appellate level. Nevertheless, a review of the ICC cases reveals

some specificities regarding sexual crimes. Some of what was thought to be lacking, was instead seen in the lack of priority given to sexual violence investigations at the first hearing before being presented at the main ICC hearing. This was based on the suspension of ICC investigations and the use of irrelevant evidence as part of the supporting evidence for the report.

Optimization efforts that can be made are to improve the investigation and investigation stage of sexual violence that occurs and reports submitted. What needs to be implemented is the need for investigators who have sensitivity to cultural issues, gender roles, and power dynamics that occur in women's lives, which aims to prevent survivors of sexual violence from being stigmatized and intervened by military forces as the perpetrators. In addition, it is also necessary to present a complete picture of the relevant actions and evidence at the beginning of the trial process to prioritize the investigation.

In addition, in terms of prosecution, there is a need to increase the efforts of the prosecutorial community to prosecute gender-based sex crimes as crimes that include genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes that will be prosecuted cumulatively. This needs to be done to provide the severest punishment for perpetrators of sexual violence in the name of a country's military power and to paint a picture of the extremely heinous sexual violence committed. It is also expressly to provide a just solution and is an attempt to recognize that sexual and gender-based crimes should be given the highest priority of investigation and prosecution.

In addition to being related to law enforcement and due process, in terms of its formulation values of sexual violence at the ICJ and the ICC, it is important to apply, where necessary consulting with civil society organizations, academics, legal

practitioners, policy makers, and survivors of sexual violence to develop a comprehensive definition of sexual violence. The Hague Principles resulting in Sexual Violence follow a broad interpretation of sexual violence and refer, for example, to the motivation of the perpetrator, the impact on the victim's sexual autonomy, sexual orientation, gender identity, or reproductive capacity or autonomy, as well as the use of sexual innuendo or language. In compiling a detailed list of acts of sexual violence, the Principles will certainly contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of sexual violence and serve as a guide for future international tribunals.

2. The Sexual Slavery and access to Direct and Indirect Criminal Liability

Sexual slavery is a practice or act in which an individual or group of individuals is treated as the property of another person with the primary aim of being sexually exploited, including being forced to engage in sexual activities without consent, either individually or collectively (Chang et al., 2022). In general, sexual slavery involves the deprivation of a person's freedom, whether through detention, threats, violence, deception, or coercion. Victims are forced to engage in sexual activities for the benefit of the perpetrator or others, often in a systematic context, such as in armed conflicts or war situations. Sexual slavery is recognized as a crime against humanity and a war crime under international law, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Khan et al., 2023). This practice is a serious violation of human rights and is universally prohibited. Sexual slavery is a severe form of exploitation and a violation of human rights, where victims lose their freedom and are forced to engage in sexual activities, often with violence and within an organized system, especially during times of war or armed conflict.

Sexual slavery is defined as an act where the perpetrator exercises ownership rights over one or more persons, such as buying, selling, lending, or exchanging them, and forcing them to perform one or more sexual acts, which occurs in the context of international or non-international armed conflict (Khan et al., 2023). In the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), sexual slavery is categorized as a war crime and a crime against humanity. States parties are obligated to prosecute and punish the perpetrators of this crime. Sexual slavery is considered a serious violation of human rights, particularly the right to freedom, dignity, and protection from violence and exploitation (Jovanovic, 2020). International human rights and international humanitarian law explicitly prohibit all forms of sexual violence, including sexual slavery, both in international and non-international armed conflicts. This protection is enshrined in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocols, as well as various other international human rights instruments (Jovanovic, 2020).

The recognition of sexual slavery as a standalone crime in international law has developed through the jurisprudence of international tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR), which was then explicitly adopted in the Rome Statute of the ICC. The ICC has jurisdiction to prosecute perpetrators of sexual slavery when states are unable or unwilling to handle it. Law enforcement against sexual slavery still faces significant challenges, particularly related to impunity, lack of reporting, and victim protection. Sexual slavery in war constitutes a serious violation of human rights and international law. This practice has been unequivocally recognized as a war crime and a crime against humanity, with an obligation for states and the international

community to prevent, prosecute, and provide justice and reparation for the victims.

Too often the lack of judicial redress for sexual violence is lamented, but excused on two grounds. Firstly, the inability to identify physical perpetrators and secondly, the inability to prosecute non-physical perpetrators, such as people who are geographically distant from the scene of the crime, yet responsible as political leaders or military commanders. However, there are two forms of individual criminal liability: direct criminal liability and indirect criminal liability that can resolve the dilemma.

Direct responsibility involves any accused who has planned, instigated, committed, ordered, aided or abetted the commission of a crime within the jurisdiction of the Statute. The text of Article 7(1) of the ICTY Statute and Article 6(1) of the ICTR Statute, respectively, are simplified forms of direct responsibility, and have provided for the punishment of persons who have committed aided or abetted, investigated, or planned sexual violence, such as rape or forced nudity. Direct liability is not always the same as physical. In some cases, the perpetrator does not have physical contact with the victim of sexual sexual violence with the victim/survivor even though he or she may be near the scene of the crime or far from the scene. This is in the ICC's reformulated provisions on direct criminal liability (Direct Individual Criminal Liability in Articles 25, n.d.).

The form of direct individual criminal liability recognized by the ICTY judges derives from "doing" and is known as joint criminal enterprise (JCE). This has important implications for prosecuting sexual violence cases. Whenever perpetrators participate in a criminal act with a number of perpetrators, they commit a JCE. Two very important court decisions have emerged from the jurisprudence of the category

that can further ensure women have access to gender-based violence prohibited by IHL and international criminal law. First, in the Krstic Judgment, the tribunal found that as a member of a joint criminal enterprise formed to carry out massive forced displacement that precipitated a humanitarian crisis, for involuntary manslaughter and rape, the beatings and torture were humanitarian in nature because they were a "natural and foreseeable consequence of the intended criminal act." The Krstic Judgment also found that as a member of a joint criminal enterprise formed to carry out massive forced displacement that precipitated a humanitarian crisis, the killing and rape were "a natural and foreseeable consequence of the intended criminal act."

The decision to rule that sexual violence can be natural and foreseeable as a consequence of other wartime abuses, thereby reversing the conventional and gendered belief that wartime sexual abuse is the inevitable, isolated deviant behavior of soldiers whose abuses go unnoticed by their military superiors. Therefore, crimes of sexual violence, either as part of the original common plan, or as a foreseeable consequence of another common plan or later developed crime following the original common purpose, create individual criminal liability through JCE. The JCE approach, which recognizes the foreseeability of sexual violence provides a useful and clear framework for joint liability, particularly for participants/perpetrators who are physically distant from the location of sexual violence crimes, including military leaders and political leaders.

The second form of individual criminal liability is indirect criminal liability. It is the responsibility of a person in a higher position of authority, whether military, political business, or other hierarchical status, for acts directly committed by a subordinate (Article 7(3) of the ITCY Statute). Crimes prevalent in wartime

scenarios involve military personnel in the chain of command or political persons in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Indirect superior responsibility is an appropriate way to achieve accountability of some persons who are in a higher position of command than the direct perpetrator.

While there may be a tendency for command and superior responsibility to cede grounds for prosecuting forms of JCE liability, only future ICC prosecutions and judgments can explore the long-term legal acceptability and feasibility of JCE liability. Even with the development of JCE legal principles, military or civilian leaders who fail to ensure the discipline of their subordinates (Article 7(3) of the ITCY Statute) ensure the continued relevance of the doctrine of superior responsibility. Along with substantive sexual violence crimes, access to direct and indirect theories of individual responsibility, based on the facts and actions of the perpetrator should be part of the implementation of equal access to justice to ensure women's human rights (OHCHR 2007).

C. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this research discusses the legal protection of victims of sexual slavery as a war crime in Russia and Ukraine. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has resulted in significant violations of international humanitarian law, including sexual violence committed by Russian soldiers. This research explores the legal implications of sexual slavery as a war crime in the context of the ongoing conflict.

The results showed that the crime of sexual slavery as a war crime in Russia and Ukraine can be understood through the lens of international human rights law .

The research contributes to the development of human rights law and the protection of victims of sexual slavery as a war crime. This research emphasizes the importance of legal protection for victims of sexual slavery as a war crime in Russia and Ukraine. This protection should be based on international human rights law and should be realized through comprehensive and sustainable efforts.

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