

THE HAGUE PRINCIPLES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR ACTIVISTS

Sexual violence is a difficult topic to navigate and is often not well understood. While it occurs in many forms, there is no universal view as to what makes an act “sexual”. Drawing directly from extensive consultations with more than 500 survivors and 60 civil society organizations from around the world, The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence provide widely shared views on sexual violence in all its forms.

Oftentimes, laws and policies that address sexual violence do not reflect the lived experience of survivors, and as a result, victims are at risk to be ignored and forgotten if certain acts are not recognized. The Hague Principles seek to ensure that practitioners – ranging from legal practitioners to NGO workers to policy makers – do not trivialize or overlook certain types of sexual violence.

The Hague Principles consist of three elements:

- 1. The Civil Society Declaration on Sexual Violence**, providing general guidance on what makes violence “sexual”, especially to survivors;
- 2. The International Criminal Law (ICL) Guidelines on Sexual Violence**, translating the Civil Society Declaration into practical guidance for criminal justice practitioners working toward accountability for conflict and atrocity related sexual violence crimes; and
- 3. Key Principles for Policy Makers on Sexual Violence** to incorporate in policy development and implementation, legislative strategies, and legal and judicial procedures.

GUIDANCE ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A key element of The Hague Principles is the Civil Society Declaration on Sexual Violence, which includes an explanation of the concept of "sexual violence". Understood broadly, the concept of sexual violence encompasses all violations of sexual autonomy and sexual integrity. It is often characterized by humiliation, domination, and destruction.

The survivors we consulted shared that to them, acts of sexual violence can fall into two categories. On the one hand, acts of a sexual nature can be inherently violent, such as sexually harassing someone by making gestures with a sexual overtone or sending sexually explicit messages; or depriving someone of access to menstrual products. On the other hand, acts may amount to sexual violence if they are committed forcibly or without a person's consent, for example kissing and biting, sharing nude pictures, or having someone feign sexual enjoyment.

THE CONCEPT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE ENCOMPASSES ALL VIOLATIONS OF SEXUAL AUTONOMY AND SEXUAL INTEGRITY.

USE OF THE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

The Declaration can be used to better understand sexual violence and identify more victims, to teach others about the topic, and to work with politicians and decision makers to broaden laws and policies. Though The Hague Principles are not law in themselves, they can give activists guidance and more legitimacy in their work. If sexual violence is better understood, it can be addressed more effectively.