

THE HAGUE PRINCIPLES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

TALKING POINTS FOR ACTIVISTS

1. WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

- Sexual violence occurs in many different forms but there is no universal agreement on what makes an experience “sexual”. Whether an act is “sexual” often depends on the circumstances and how it is perceived by survivors themselves. The Hague Principles list various examples of acts of sexual violence and give guidance as to what makes an act “sexual”.

2. HOW DO I KNOW IF AN ACT IS “SEXUAL”?

- An act can also be seen as “sexual” if it takes away someone’s freedom to make decisions about their own body or sexuality.

3. WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF “SEXUAL VIOLENCE”?

- Sexual violence occurs in many different forms and there is no universally accepted definition. The Hague Principles provide a widely accepted delineation of “sexual violence”, highlighting that the concept should be understood broadly as all violations of sexual autonomy and sexual integrity. It is often characterized by humiliation, domination, and destruction. “Other forms of sexual violence” include acts that the victim, the perpetrator, or their communities find to be sexual, beside the acts that are widely seen as sexual violence, such as rape and sexual slavery.

4. BUT HASN’T SEXUAL VIOLENCE BEEN DEFINED IN THE LAW ALREADY?

- Some forms of sexual violence are defined as crimes in national laws and in international law, but others are missing or are not defined in an explicit manner. Acts that survivors see as sexual violence but are often not defined in the law, include, for example, depriving someone of access to menstrual products or forcing someone to feign sexual enjoyment.

5. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT THESE “OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE”?

- If certain acts are not recognized or identified as sexual violence, the victims of these crimes are ignored and forgotten. They can't go to court or get support from the government if these institutions don't understand why a certain act amounts to sexual violence. The victims have also suffered, and deserve recognition for their suffering.

6. HOW CAN IT BE SEXUAL VIOLENCE IF THERE WAS NO PHYSICAL CONTACT?

- Many acts of a sexual nature can be violent without physical contact. Acts like forcing someone to perform dance movements with a sexual association, disseminating nude images of someone, or making gestures with a sexual overtone can be called sexual violence even though there is no physical contact involved.

7. WHAT ARE THE HAGUE PRINCIPLES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

- The Hague Principles provide an explanation of the concept of “sexual violence”. They were developed together with more than 500 survivors and 60 civil society organizations from around the world to help better understand sexual violence.

8. HOW CAN I USE THE HAGUE PRINCIPLES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

- The Civil Society Declaration, which is part of the Principles, includes general definitions and examples of the various forms of sexual violence. 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.

9. WHY SHOULD I USE THE HAGUE PRINCIPLES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

- The Hague Principles are used by activists, lawyers, and practitioners worldwide to promote a better understanding of sexual violence. Though The Hague Principles are not law in themselves, they can give you guidance and more legitimacy in your work as an activist. With the Principles, you are able to show policy - makers that survivors came together to develop and demand a better understanding of the different forms of sexual violence that exist. If sexual violence is better understood, it can be addressed more effectively.