



A SURVIVOR  
ADVOCACY  
GUIDE TO  
**THE HAGUE  
PRINCIPLES ON  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

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# PART I.

## BACKGROUND OF THE SURVIVOR ADVOCACY GUIDE ON THE HAGUE PRINCIPLES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

### 1. What is the survivor guide?

The survivor guide aims to provide survivor-advocates with a tool to understanding the larger survivor advocacy toolkit, including both background information of The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence and tips on implementing the document into their own advocacy work. The survivor guide has been developed in order to more effectively communicate the goals of The Hague Principles to survivor activists.

The survivor guide is divided into three parts. Part I will continue with information on the guide and provide more information on who the survivor guide is intended for (primarily survivor activists). Part II explores The Hague Principles in further detail, including information on why the document is so crucial to making real change in the area of combating sexual violence. Part III will help to support survivor activists in understanding how they can implement this tool in their own work, following the steps of an advocacy planning cycle.

### 2. Who is the survivor guide for?

All survivors who are interested in carrying out awareness-raising and advocacy activities may benefit from this guide. The guide has been written, however, for those who are already involved in these types of activities and have therefore developed a basic understanding of activities, audience and messaging in terms of advocacy work. Though the guide does include a short review of main points to consider when advocating for themes related to justice, better victim support, more recognition or any other topic, more in-depth knowledge can be found by consulting other resources that explain the main principles of advocacy.

The guide therefore serves as a tool for victims and survivors who believe that The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence would add to their own advocacy and awareness-raising efforts, or identify a need for a separate campaign in their own country. NGOs working directly with survivor-advocates are also invited to read this guide, whether to gain insights into their own advocacy work, or in order to pass on this information to those survivors and victims they are working with.

# PART II.

## THE HAGUE PRINCIPLES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

### 1. What are The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence?

The Hague Principles for Sexual Violence adopted a survivor-centered approach for developing a comprehensive understanding of sexual violence in all its forms. Part of this document, the Civil Society Declaration on Sexual Violence provides, “general guidance on what makes violence ‘sexual,’ especially to survivors. Such a tool ensures that practitioners – ranging from legal practitioners to NGO workers to policy-makers – do not ignore certain types of violence. The Hague Principles indicate to all relevant stakeholders – including those who have been working to support victims for years – that though we may think we understand sexual violence and agree with the notion that definitions of sexual violence are incomplete, we cannot complete this understanding ourselves but rather the input from survivors is crucial.

The most important part of The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence is that it encompasses the input of victims and survivors themselves who guided the development of this document. Rather than looking to outdated legal frameworks or practitioners supporting sexual violence victims, it is only the victim or survivor who can fully define and mold our understanding of sexual violence. The true perceptions of victims and survivors must be represented and prioritized.

*[We] must emphasize that us survivors came together and built this document. To let them know this is not from some office, but survivors came together and [we] defined how to see sexual violence.*

As part of The Hague Principles, the Civil Society Declaration – the most relevant part of the document for survivor advocacy – draws on the experiences of survivors, to recognize that a) the consequences of sexual violence extend beyond the victim to include families and communities, and can persist over different generations; b) sexual violence can be committed at any moment and context, can be committed by and against any person; and c) sexual violence can be committed through a number of means, including control over the sexual and reproductive capacity of a person; forcing one or several persons to commit acts of sexual violence; or the intrusion over physical, mental or emotional space of individuals.

## 2. Why are The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence so important?

The Hague Principles aim to amplify the voices of victims. More specifically, they are able to:

- Emphasize a victim-centered perspective when addressing sexual violence, including its consequences;
- Push for legislation and policies that can address sexual violence in a more efficient and holistic manner;
- Shed light into practices and challenges of sexual violence among legal practitioners, and avoid them trivializing or brushing off such acts;
- Recognize and validate the experiences of victims of sexual violence;

*Imagine you have arranged a meeting with a policy-maker to encourage legislation that recognizes the suffering of your friend who was held in detention and faced threats of sexual violence every day. Even though you know this is a crime, it is not recognized as such by your country's legal system. Though The Hague Principles are not law in themselves, they can show the policy-maker that survivors came together, developed together the different forms of sexual violence that exist, and now have a resource to refer to in order to show that these are crimes, and that these actions demand punishment. This document can then validate their experiences.*

# PART III.

## APPLYING THE HAGUE PRINCIPLES TO YOUR OWN ADVOCACY WORK

### 1. During which activities can The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence be used?

Below we present examples of activities that you may be engaging in that can benefit from The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence.

#### **Awareness-raising events and community-sensitization**

You may be involved in events with your community, with religious or traditional leaders, with policy-makers, with the police or military, with men, or with various other individuals. The events provide a good opportunity to share information about The Hague Principles and the message they send about understanding all forms of sexual violence. The first step is always to inform others that survivors came together and – together with other experts – decided how to better understand sexual violence.

After this, your goal may be to inform your audience about the different forms of sexual violence, to show that it includes rape, but also other actions can be sexual and harmful to the victim. Encourage your audience to forget their earlier ideas about what sexual violence is. Rather, take the lead and guide them through different forms, emphasizing how the legal framework is not sufficient in defining sexual violence. What about threats of sexual violence? What about depriving someone of access to treatment of medicine related to sexual or reproductive health? What about humiliating someone based on their sexual orientation? What about forcing a person to watch sexual acts occurring?

#### ***Which tools should I use?***

*During the events, you can use different tools from the Survivor Advocacy Toolkit. For example, it might be beneficial to start with a presentation. You can use the case studies to guide an exercise with your audience, illustrating how sexual violence occurs globally and takes many forms. Be sure to leave participants of the event with a pamphlet or the summary of The Hague Principles, also included in the Survivor Advocacy Toolkit.*

#### **Radio shows**

One specific awareness-raising platform are radio shows, where you may be given the opportunity to inform the public about sexual violence and the importance of a survivor-centered approach. Radio shows are likely to have a higher reach, and if you are not already involved in these activities, you can reach

out to radio broadcasters, already sending them information on sexual violence and more specifically, The Hague Principles. In these cases, the efforts to reach out could be accompanied by the shortened summary tool, plus the document that outlines the benefits of your messages. Remember to clearly think about what you want to communicate.

### ***Which tools should I use?***

*Consider using a podcast format, also a tool that can be found in the survivor advocacy toolkit.*

### **Meetings with policy-makers**

For many survivor-activists, meeting with policy-makers are part of their/your lobbying efforts. You are able to lobby policy-makers when you build relationships and communicate effectively with them. To communicate effectively, it is important to think about how The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence fall into their wider policy aims and areas of focus. It is important to show them that using such a document can have a positive impact on society at large. Before engaging in a discussion, however, be sure that you have researched their own policies and perspectives on the issue at hand.

You can ask them (for example):

- *How are you defining sexual violence in your policies?*
- *Where can we, as survivor-activists, give feedback on draft policies around sexual violence?*
- *Can you provide examples where survivors were invited to policy discussions, or tell us where these might next take place?*

Think about how to increase your own legitimacy. Refer to The Hague Principles as a published document that gives credibility to your message – your message that a survivor-centered approach is most valuable. You can also make direct reference to the principles outlined in the document.

### ***Which tools should I use?***

*If you are invited to policy discussions, The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence in their entirety would be good to share with them. You also may want to make them the target for seminars you arrange for awareness-raising, briefly presented in the above point. Do not forget about the different tools in the Advocacy Toolkit such as the shortened summary of the Hague Principles, the talking points document, or the Calls for Action.*

Whichever tools you deem best, make sure to follow up with the meeting, re-emphasizing your message in a clear and powerful way.

Remember: You are the expert in these sessions.

## **Protests**

Another powerful advocacy tool is organizing protests or marches to raise awareness and call stakeholders to action. Protests provide groups – for example survivor groups, – with the opportunity to express opinions and grievances happening in a given society. They may demand the end to sexual violence, they may push the government for an official apology for what happened during a conflict, or they may call on relevant actors to work towards obtaining (criminal) justice for wrongs committed. The aims of the protests may include impacting public opinion, increasing the audience who will support and fight for a cause, demanding changes to or implementation of public policy or legislation, or spreading awareness by speaking one’s (collective) truth.

One aim of a protest may fall directly within the Call It What It Is Campaign that, as noted, aims to reshape our current understanding of sexual violence. Protesters may want to emphasize that sexual violence takes a number of forms; that it is not yet fully reflected in legislation; or that survivors know best what it is and need to be included in any discussions around sexual violence policy.

### ***Which tools should I use?***

*In order to bring change during a protest – whether in the form of a march, public speeches or performance art – tools in this advocacy toolkit may be useful. The Hague Principles already can provide some insights into developing slogans, which are key to protest material. These slogans may be extracted from the existing text, but adapted based on context and need.*

## **Peer-to-peer education with other survivors**

Around the world, survivors are working together in organizations or networks to build solidarity and work together towards effective change. Peer-to-peer meetings provide survivor activists with ways to come together and decide on goals moving forward, based on their needs and activities. Importantly, survivor-activists are also able to learn from one another and share different initiatives that they are engaging in. For those survivor activists interested in using The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence to obtain their advocacy goals, discussing them in an effective way with other survivors will lead to a greater understanding and alignment on how to move forward, together.

### ***Which tools should I use?***

*The survivor advocacy toolkit can provide a number of tools that would be helpful during these types of meetings, aimed at helping other survivors understand The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence and what they can achieve. While it is good to go through the Civil Society Declaration in its entirety with other activists, the paper-based tools, videos from the Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice and*

*the parts of the Workshop Curriculum (a half-day version) will support the dissemination of information during the peer-to-peer meetings.*

## 2. Who are the key stakeholders to consider in your work on The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence?

For each form of advocacy, whether those described here or other activities you may be engaged in, it is important to identify who you will approach, invite or contact. As noted earlier, you may already be engaged in work with Ministers, church leaders, men, the police, military, policy-makers or a range of other actors. When developing a mapping, be sure to think about those actors that have a lot of influence in terms of your goals, and those that have high interest in issues around your goals. For example, if you want to work towards making policy and legislative change in terms of what is considered sexual violence in your country, who would you need to approach in terms of these two factors? And be sure that you educate yourself on their existing efforts that may align with yours!

## 3. What are your primary messages to stakeholders around the Hague Principles on Sexual Violence?

Let us review what your messages might be. Remember, before beginning any interaction with others, always have your message very clear for yourself.

For example:

- *Sexual violence is not limited to legal definitions, rather it takes a number of forms*
- *Survivors are best placed to inform others on the forms of sexual violence*
- *Sexual violence has many consequences for victims, and each experience is individual regardless of the type of sexual violence*
- *Sexual violence affects the whole community and families of the victims*

Whichever perspective you take, remember to emphasize why the goals of your work are important for society at large. Whether your aims are to make policy change, bring about greater awareness, or support other survivors either emotionally or in terms of getting involved themselves, keep these points in mind:

- *Be sure that you have a clear definition of any concepts included in your messaging.*
- *Clearly articulate who will benefit from having a better understanding of sexual violence.*
- *Already prepare answers to difficult questions: Why do you think this is sexual violence, especially if it is not in the law? Why should we listen to you? Where do we draw the line of what is a sexual act?*
- *Talk about potential outcomes if people were to listen to your message and support your efforts to make change.*
- *Ensure that you have a unified message with all those working together with you.*
- *Find a way to illustrate your message in a meaningful, but not only shocking, way.*
- *Create messages that are: Credible, concise, consistent, simple, moral, and that include a call to action.*

# APPENDIX 1.

## ADVOCACY WORKSHEET ON THE HAGUE PRINCIPLES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

### Advocacy worksheet on The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence

After this meeting, the change I want to see is:

What is your one main message?

What are your sub-messages?

Who will you target in your meeting?

How will you engage your audience and get them to consider their responsibility?

Which tools will you use to deliver your message?