

# THE TIME FOR REPARATION IS **NOW**

**Call for Action for the 2022 International Ministerial  
Conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative**

London, 28 - 29 November 2022



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## I. THE ISSUE AND CALL FOR ACTION

“My dreams were cut short...” (CRSV Survivor, Colombia)

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is a brutal act of war; it destroys a victim’s life as they know it and is the beginning of a long and arduous process of rebuilding every aspect of their existence. Reparation<sup>1</sup> is essential to that process. However, it is rarely provided. Inaction by States and the international community is often justified with claims that providing reparation to CRSV survivors and victims is too complex, stigmatising, or unaffordable. Long used as a reason not to act, the feasibility of providing meaningful reparative measures should no longer be questioned.

The time for reparation is **now**.

Reparation is a **right** and a **priority** for survivors.

It is **urgent**.

It should be **co-created with survivors**, with the support of civil society organisations, and it requires States and the international community to take their responsibility.

This call for action draws on good practice, GSF’s project work, and research, and shows what is needed to ensure that reparation happens and is impactful.



*Body mapping workshop with victims (2021)*  
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## II. GSF'S WORK

To address this issue, the Global Survivors Fund (GSF) works to enhance access to reparation for CRSV survivors through survivors' networks and other national partners in over 20 countries across the globe. To inform where the organisation should work, GSF is leading a comprehensive global study on the status of and opportunities for reparations in more than 20 countries (the Global Reparations Study or Study), in collaboration with over 40 international, national, and local partners as well as more than 1,000 survivors across the globe.<sup>2</sup>

The Study seeks to determine the impact of CRSV, assess survivors' access to reparation and obstacles to reparation being administered, and identify opportunities for judicial and State-led administrative reparation programmes as well as interim reparative measures worldwide. Working country by country, the Study reviews legal and policy frameworks, the work of the justice system, contextual data, and gathers and shares, through a rigorous methodology, the perceptions and views of survivors. The Global Reparations Study informs GSF's three pillars of work: implementing Interim Reparative Measures (IRM) projects, advocating for reparation for survivors and victims of CRSV and

providing technical assistance to governments and other actors on how to make reparations accessible.

Through the implementation of IRM projects developed with survivors and national partners, reparative measures are provided to survivors and victims, to support their process of healing and rebuilding their lives in circumstances where duty-bearers have yet to comply with their obligation to provide reparation. IRM projects are co-created with survivors which carries reparative value in itself. They show to States and other duty-bearers that reparation is urgent, feasible, and affordable.

IRM projects are currently taking place in Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Turkey (for Syrian survivors), and the Central African Republic. GSF is scoping for IRM projects in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Timor Leste. The impact of these projects has been externally evaluated by the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR). Through GSF's Interim Reparative Measures projects, the Global Reparations Study and existing lessons learned, survivors and other relevant stakeholders have reiterated the following call for action.

### III. THE WAY FORWARD



#### REPARATION IS A RIGHT AND A PRIORITY FOR SURVIVORS

**“Reparation is putting victims in their rights.”** (CRSV Survivor, Guinea)

For survivors and victims of CRSV, reparation is a right and a priority. For many years, the international community has not prioritised providing **adequate, prompt, and effective reparation** when responding to mass or systematic human rights abuses.

**“Because I am a human being and not an animal, I have the right to reparation – the dignity that belongs to me needs to be restored.”** (CRSV Survivor, South Sudan)

Survivors demand this justice. While criminal accountability is an essential component of

comprehensive reparation, it is just one form of justice. In almost every context, survivors’ priorities in the wake of sexual violence include other forms of reparation that address their basic survival needs such as health care, housing, and livelihood support. Survivors also demand acknowledgement of the harm caused to them and other forms of symbolic or collective redress to affirm their dignity.

**“Justice without reparation is not justice, we need a justice that provides to all of the people.”** (CRSV Survivor, South Sudan)

For many survivors, reparation provides the **starting point for rebuilding their lives** and remains a priority throughout their lives.



Demonstration of victims of Hissein Habré’s regime in the streets of N’Djamena (June 2021)

© Clément Abaifouta

“Reparations are important to me to be able to go on, without psychological burdens. To keep going in this life and increase my skills. This life is ever changing, and we must keep up with this change.” (CRSV Survivor, Syria)

Reparation is also an important **tool to address stigma** associated with CRSV. In most contexts, sexual violence leads to a loss of social status, being shamed, being seen as ‘dirty’ or ‘crazy’ as a result of trauma, being seen as having sided with the enemy, or living with health-related complications such as HIV and fistula. The loss of income-generating capacity and ability to support their families also decreases survivors’ status, particularly as it affects their role and identity as providers. Survivors want to see these prejudices corrected through reparative processes that include elements of compensation and acknowledgement. Livelihood and financial support help survivors regain some form of economic status, and a survivor-centred reparation process contributes to shifting the blame to those responsible for their suffering. Tackling stigma can be lifesaving for survivors and can lead to long-term societal transformation that can address some of the root causes of CRSV. CRSV creates silences through stigma and shame that need to be carefully and consciously addressed for it to be overcome. While reparation is critical, most survivors continue to wait decades after the end of a conflict, or years after the start of transitional justice processes, and many die without receiving it. In Bangladesh, [Cambodia](#), and [Chad](#) for example, where the sexual violence dates back to the 1970s and 1980s, CRSV survivors that are still alive have yet to access any meaningful comprehensive reparation.

Even in countries where there is a State-led administrative reparation programme, CRSV survivors are often excluded. Reparation programmes should

**explicitly include survivors of CRSV** as a category of beneficiaries, unless doing so would have an adverse impact on their safety or well-being by bringing attention to the nature of the crimes they have suffered. Furthermore, survivors make clear that this is not a decision that can be made for them. There are contexts in which expressly naming CRSV as a form of crime for which reparation is due serves to recognise the harms caused and can contribute to reducing stigma rather than augmenting it. But where survivors so request, camouflage measures designed together with survivors can be put in place to protect them while ensuring that they can anonymously access reparation.

When reparation and other reparative measures are implemented, they often narrowly target survivors of CRSV according to the conventional understanding of the term. Because of this, the **diversity of survivors**, the range of abuses, and the types of harm are generally not recognised. Reparation programmes need to acknowledge this diversity and seek to respond to the particular needs of different survivor groups. In doing so, they must integrate an **intersectional approach** to address the ways in which people’s social identities can overlap and create compounded experiences of discrimination. This includes children who were abused, who were born of sexual violence, or who have witnessed or otherwise been affected by the abuses suffered by their caregivers. It also includes men, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and survivors of reproductive violence.

In the few countries where CRSV survivors are included in reparation programmes such as in [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [Colombia](#), Ivory Coast, and [Iraq](#), they generally face overwhelming obstacles when seeking access to reparation. These barriers include heavy administrative conditions, unclear eligibility criteria, unrealistic evidentiary standards, no assurances of confidentiality, and lack of access to participation fees. Concerted efforts are needed to ensure that the right to reparation of CRSV survivors and victims in all their diversities is fulfilled on paper and in practice.



**URGENT INTERIM REPARATION MUST BE PROVIDED IMMEDIATELY**

Reparation is rarely provided in the immediate aftermath of harm, even though this is when it is most needed. Survivors have persistently expressed the extent of their suffering after enduring brutal acts of sexual violence, patiently describing again and again what their needs are, why they are urgent, and how the lack of reparative measures makes everything so much worse for themselves and those in their care. And yet, they wait.

Survivors engaged in GSF’s project work and research across the globe underscore the urgency of providing urgent interim reparation if the harms caused by CRSV are to be addressed adequately. Once a person has endured CRSV, they often lose everything. The harm caused will then be compounded if they face painful long-term physical and psychological conditions, a consequent inability to work, and social rejection. The longer it takes to access **comprehensive medical treatment and psychosocial care and livelihood support**, the greater the likelihood of medical complications and increased psychological trauma, of severe long-term conditions and chronic pain, stigma, social exclusion and family breakdowns, and further losses of identity and livelihood because of an inability to work or function.

**EXTRACT FROM THE KINSHASA DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS TO REPARATION AND CO-CREATION OF SURVIVORS AND VICTIMS OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

Reparations are urgent given that conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence often imposes an immediate threat to the person’s survival or basic health and can cause life-long health complications (both psychological and physical), disabilities and socio-economic harms which are compounded if not addressed without delay. Urgent interim reparations should be provided immediately pending comprehensive reparations. Such reparations measures should be co-created with survivors and should include medical and psychological care, compensation as needed and livelihood support.

To tackle the stigma attached to sexual violence and prevent further victimisation, **public acknowledgement** of the crime perpetrated, and harms suffered also needs to come as early as possible as a form of reparation.



*Ukrainian families flee the war across the border in Beregsurany to a peaceful area – February 26, 2022*  
 © Janossy Gergely / Shutterstock



In Nepal, where the transitional justice process has experienced numerous delays, CRSV survivors have been left waiting for the truth commission to finalise recommendations for reparations. Many years after their victimisation, these survivors are still being neglected despite their urgent needs.

**“My health condition is very bad. Still, I cannot walk properly if I don’t get medicine regularly. Many times, I have suicidal thoughts looking at my physical and financial conditions.”**

(CRSV Survivor, Nepal)

In [Ukraine](#), CRSV survivors have been calling for reparation to redress the harms they have suffered since the start of the conflict in 2014. The escalation of the conflict and Russian invasion in 2022 offers opportunities to advance reparation efforts by domestic and international actors. GSF and the Ukrainian government

are exploring how **urgent interim reparation can be provided immediately even as the conflict unfolds, paving the way for longer-term reparation**. This ongoing work should set an important precedent and serve as a blueprint for other contexts by demonstrating how immediate action can prevent irreparable harm and break cycles of violence.

Reparation is urgent. Some forms of reparation can and must be provided as soon as possible after every CRSV event. Waiting until the end of the conflict, the closing of the humanitarian chapter, the award of a court, or the development of a transitional justice process or domestic reparation programme undermines the rights of survivors, the potential to provide reparation in a meaningful way, and the opportunity to prevent irreparable harm. Enhancing and interconnecting parallel interventions such as humanitarian assistance, urgent interim reparation, and development, and **recognising survivors and victims as right-holders from the start**, can help lay down foundations for comprehensive reparation.



## CO-CREATION WITH SURVIVORS AND CIVIL SOCIETY INVOLVEMENT IS A NECESSITY

**“I think the victims should be involved in this process. Why for us but without us?”**

(CRSV Survivor, Ukraine)

Victims and survivors are best placed to know what forms of individual and collective reparation can help them rebuild their lives, acknowledge the wrongdoings inflicted upon them, and provide them with a sense of justice. The motto of SEMA, the Global Network of Victims and Survivors of Wartime Sexual Violence, makes this clear: “Nothing about us, without us!”

At the heart of GSF’s work is both a survivor-centred approach and meaningful participation of victims and survivors. In its IRM projects, GSF has developed a unique co-creation model, working with survivors as equal partners, recognising and nurturing their agency, and ensuring their ongoing engagement as full and active participants at every stage of the process and in every decision that may

affect them. **Moving from mere consultation of victims and survivors to a co-creation model** ensures that survivors experience the process as reparative and feel recognised as right-holders. It also contributes to reparation having a life-changing impact as documented in the **NSCR Report *Impacting the lives of survivors: Interim Reparative Measures of the Global Survivors Fund in Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo***, released together with this Conference Briefing.

**“Women victims of sexual violence must be put at the centre of the discussions, but also of the plans, programmes, and projects that are designed at the national level, in the framework of what they call reparation.”** (CRSV Survivor, Colombia)

“Those who saw us as losers saw us differently. (...) The individual interim reparative measures have changed our lives.” (CRSV Survivor, Guinea)



Participant during workshop in Nepalgunj in 2017  
© Elena Naughton

“We don’t have trust in the government. Maybe organisations can help us. We trust them. We can openly share our incident with an organisation like you and some others who have been supporting us regularly. You empowered us and also teach us the language for doing our advocacy on our own.” (CRSV Survivor, Nepal)

In many victims’ lives, the State has been completely absent, or responsible for the violence, and is mistrusted. Often, civil society organisations have filled this gap and over the years developed a deep understanding and trust with survivor constituencies.

Reparation programmes therefore need to be **designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated not only with survivors but also with the involvement of civil society organisations** who work with them and have gained their trust. They have an important role to play, for instance in identification and registration processes and to ensure confidentiality, as highlighted, for example, by survivors in [Nepal](#).

**Co-creation** with survivors and involvement of civil society organisations is not only a moral obligation or buy-in strategy but an **operational necessity to ensure the feasibility and effectiveness of reparation**. Legal and policy frameworks pertaining to reparation should explicitly recognise this principle, set out how States and the international community will work hand-in-hand with survivors, define the role of civil society organisations and provide for relevant mechanisms and systems in that respect.



## STATES AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT

### Responsible States

States have the obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of individuals under their jurisdiction. As such, they are responsible for providing CRSV survivors and other victims of gross human rights violations with adequate, prompt, and effective access to remedies and reparation through both judicial and administrative remedies. When gross violations of human rights and serious violations of humanitarian law take place, it is essential that States establish **State-led reparation programmes** to provide administrative reparation to victims, including CRSV survivors, requiring minimal formality. These have the potential of being more timely, inclusive, and accessible than courts, hence reaching larger number of survivors.

It therefore remains an imperative that the States in which CRSV has occurred step up and assume their responsibility to provide reparation which exists even when the State is not directly involved in the commission of the crimes.

This work can be started immediately in different ways, including the following:

- Provide acknowledgment and recognition to CRSV survivors and victims.
- Provide urgent interim reparation, including medical care, psychological support, financial support, and other forms of reparation as applicable, to all victims of conflict-related sexual violence.
- Make every effort to gather complete and accurate information about patterns of CRSV, those impacted by it, their location, as well as numbers of potential victims.
- Identify victims' reparation needs and expectations in a gender, survivor-centric, and culturally sensitive manner.
- Establish a victims' registry that includes both individual and collective beneficiaries of reparation.
- Conduct prompt, effective, independent, and impartial investigations into CRSV incidents or patterns of violations.
- Enable synergies, where possible, between the work of investigation bodies and reparation bodies so that one can complement and contribute to the work of the other.
- Make sure that both the content and processes of any domestic reparation programme is defined together with survivors and victims. This will require development of a co-creation process where they can actively participate in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating reparation programmes.
- Collaborate with civil society, experts, non-governmental organisations, international organisations and bodies, and other relevant stakeholders as appropriate on the establishment and implementation of a domestic reparation programme. In particular, civil society's role in the identification of victims and registration process can ensure that the process itself is friendly and reparative.
- Ensure that any reparation programme includes diverse forms of reparation, and not only compensation, so that it can respond to the diverse needs articulated by survivors.
- Ensure that eligibility criteria for any reparation programmes are framed in a way that includes all categories of CRSV survivors or victims.
- Design and put in place processes that are simple and friendly with minimal formality, low evidentiary thresholds, and easily accessible to all who qualify.
- Respect survivors' right to privacy and protect their data.
- Ensure that the application process to access reparation for CRSV survivors is not unduly limited in time.
- Cost the delivery of reparation, consider how to finance it, including through the repurposing of sanctioned assets, and allocate an appropriate budget annually to that end.

### **International community**

Responsibility for reparation lies squarely with States, who are duty-bound to ensure that victims and survivors are provided with reparation. The reality is that in many cases States are neglecting this responsibility and are still unwilling or unable to fulfil their obligation to provide reparation.

Where this is the case, alternatives must be found. It is unacceptable that access to meaningful reparation be determined solely by whether the State in which CRSV occurs chooses to act.

Where responsible national governments fail to act, the international community, including other States, international organisations, and international financial institutions, must mobilise and cooperate to ensure victims' and survivors' right to reparation is fulfilled and make clear to them that they have not been forgotten.

It can do so in a variety of ways including the following:

- Publicly recognise the existence of CRSV and acknowledge the harms caused to survivors and victims.
- Exercise diplomatic pressure on States to assume their responsibility for providing reparation in accordance with international standards.
- Finance urgent interim reparation and interim reparative measures that allow survivors to start rebuilding their lives, equipping them to participate in the development of wider domestic reparation programmes going forward.
- Ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided with a human rights approach, recognising victims and survivors as right-holders. Humanitarian assistance could lay important foundations for enhancing reparation efforts.
- Ensure that assets of individuals, entities, and States involved in gross human rights violations are seized through sanctions regimes and associated fines are repurposed for the benefit of victims of CRSV and other human rights violations.
- Invest in civil society and survivors' initiatives that not only provide safe spaces for survivors to come together and share their experience and alleviate their burdens, but also support survivors' agency to participate in reparation processes and advocate for their rights to be fulfilled.
- Offer technical support and financing means to governments who show willingness to set up domestic reparation programmes.

**"The whole world is responsible. The whole world has had a hand in the Syria situation." (CRSV Survivor, Syria)**

## IV. THE TIME FOR REPARATION IS **NOW**

Reparation is not only a right. It is essential for survivors to rebuild their lives and become agents of social change. To achieve this, reparation requires co-creation; putting survivors at the centre, actively listening to them, providing them with a platform for action, and helping them to experience a meaningful reparation process that counters stigma. Involving civil society organisations trusted by survivors can have a multiplier effect making reparation truly accessible to large numbers of survivors.

But we must act together. To be feasible, reparation measures need a concerted multi-stakeholder effort, involving responsible States, civil society, survivor networks, and the international community.

State-led reparation programmes are the way to provide survivors of CRSV with adequate, prompt and effective access to reparation. They are affordable. Creative solutions to finance them can be found, including through the repurposing of sanctioned assets.

Lessons have been learned over more than two decades of analysing obstacles and solutions to provide reparation to survivors of CRSV. Now we need to move from analysis to action. The time for reparation has come. The call for action of this report draws from those lessons learned. By collectively acting upon them we can avoid repeating the errors of the past, and ensure reparation for survivors. Now.



*Sensitisation mission, Kasika, DRC, September 2020*

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1. **Reparation** consists of both the process as well as the measures that survivors and victims are entitled to from the State or other duty bearers to remedy the harms suffered due to CRSV. The forms of reparation have been defined by international standards, and may include restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. Reparation can be individual or collective in nature with both material and symbolic components. It may be awarded either by judicial bodies or through domestic administrative mechanisms or programmes established by the State or international mechanisms as applicable.
2. In the context of the Global Reparations Study several country reports have been published, including: Hanušić Bećirović and others, **Bosnia and Herzegovina** Study on opportunities for reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence: We raise our voices, Trial International, Vive Žene and GSF (March 2022); Goetz and others, **South Sudan** Study on the status of and opportunities for reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, Rights for Peace, Dialogue & Research Institute, Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice, GSF and Transitional Justice Working Group (March 2022); Sandoval Villalba and others, Study on the situation and opportunities of the right to reparation for victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in **Colombia**: Victims at the centre of reparation, GSF, Asociación de Mujeres Afrodescendientes del Norte del Cauca and Caribe Afirmativo (June 2022); Nassar and others, **Ukraine** Study on the status of and opportunities for reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, GSF, Blue Bird, The Eastern-Ukrainian Center for Civic Initiatives (EUCCI) and Truth Hounds (June 2022); Rudi, **Cambodia** Study on opportunities for reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence: Left without Calla, REDRESS, Kdei Kiruna and GSF (July 2022); Akumu and others, **Uganda** Study on opportunities for reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence: We cannot survive on hope and promises alone, International Center for Transitional Justice, Women's Advocacy Network, GSF (May 2022). The publication of more country reports is expected in the upcoming year. More information on additional countries is also available in the country briefings on Central African Republic, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Iraq, Kenya, Nepal and Syria that are published on our website: <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/guide>.





# GLOBAL SURVIVORS FUND

A GLOBAL FUND FOR SURVIVORS OF  
CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

