

POSITION PAPER

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Round 1: Assistance to Victims

Roundtable on Combating Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Standing Committee on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, House of Representatives of the Netherlands

20 May 2026

The Scale and Nature of the Problem

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is not an inevitable by-product of war. It is a deliberate weapon used strategically with extreme cruelty, to terrorise populations, destroy social cohesion and assert dominance. Warring parties use it to humiliate communities, drive displacement, punish perceived opposition, and break the will to resist. It is cheap, effective and — as long as impunity persists — largely consequence-free for those who order or commit it.

CRSV is being used as a weapon of war right now in conflicts across the world: in the DRC, Sudan, Ukraine, Myanmar, Haiti and beyond. It is not limited to any region, religion, or type of conflict. Anyone can be a victim; women and girls are disproportionately targeted but men and boys are also victimised, often invisibly.

The consequences of CRSV are life-changing and transgenerational. Survivors bear severe physical injuries, lasting psychological trauma, social stigma, economic marginalisation and broken family ties. Children born of rape carry the trauma into the next generation. Communities fracture. The harm does not end when the violence stops but instead compounds over time in the absence of care, recognition and justice.

What support do survivors need: The Holistic Model

Assistance to survivors cannot be reduced to medical care alone. At the Mukwege Foundation, our work is grounded in the Panzi Holistic Model, developed by Dr. Denis Mukwege and his team at Panzi Hospital in the DRC. This model rests on four integrated pillars: medical care, psychological and psychosocial support, socio-economic reintegration, and legal support.

A survivor who receives medical treatment but has no access to justice does not fully heal. Healing requires acknowledgement. It requires accountability. It requires that CRSV is recognised for what it is: a crime with perpetrators who must be held accountable. The Mukwege Foundation therefore insists that access to justice is a component of holistic care, not a separate agenda. When survivors are left without recognition, without reparation and without any legal pathway, their suffering is compounded. Impunity re-traumatises.

Genuine survivor-centered support must address all four pillars, coordinated through a one-stop model that avoids re-traumatisation and upholds confidentiality, dignity, and informed consent at every stage. The Mukwege Foundation's approach is explicitly **survivor-centred**, guided by the principle "Nothing about us, without us." Survivors are not passive recipients of services, they are agents of change who define their own needs and solutions, participate in programme design and evaluation, and set their own priorities. The survivor-centred approach is not merely a methodological preference; it is the foundation of a successful approach.

Survivors as Agents of Change

Stigma remains one of the most destructive and persistent consequences of CRSV. It isolates survivors, reinforces shame and protects perpetrators. Addressing stigma cannot be done by outside organisations

alone. It requires survivors to be able to speak openly, reclaim their dignity and find solidarity with others who have shared their experience.

This is why peer-to-peer networks are not supplementary — they are strategic. Through the SEMA Global Survivors Network, the Mukwege Foundation connects survivors across 26 countries for joint advocacy, peer learning, coaching and solidarity. SEMA creates safe spaces where survivors can voice their needs, know their rights, and organise for change. National survivor networks amplify this further, ensuring that survivors' voices are present at every level, from local policymaking to international forums. When survivors speak with one voice on the global stage, they shift what is politically possible. They change the narrative from shame to accountability, and from victimhood to agency. Investing in these networks is investing in the most effective and sustainable engine of change available.

The Gap in Prevention: Impunity Enables Recurrence

Prevention of CRSV is inseparable from accountability. Where perpetrators face no consequences, at the individual level or at the state level, the weapon continues to be used. The most effective prevention initiative is the credible threat of prosecution and the consistent enforcement of international law.

The legal framework exists. CRSV is prohibited under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international criminal law. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court classifies rape and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes, crimes against humanity and, in certain cases, genocide. UN Security Council resolutions (notably 1325, 1820, and subsequent resolutions) establish obligations for states to prevent, respond to and prosecute CRSV.

Yet in practice, the gap between the legal framework and its implementation is vast. Perpetrators are rarely arrested, prosecuted or brought to trial, and states rarely hold each other to account. Structural barriers include the collapse of justice systems in conflict-affected states, lack of survivor-sensitive evidentiary standards, witness protection failures, stigma that deters survivors from coming forward and often insufficient political will.

This is the core of the Mukwege Foundation's **Red Line Initiative**: it works to strengthen and clarify States' legal obligations relevant to CRSV and aims to build political will for more robust and timely responses at the national and international level when CRSV occurs. States that deploy, condone or fail to prevent and prosecute CRSV must face political, diplomatic and legal consequences from the international community. Until both levels of accountability are enforced, impunity will persist and prevention will remain aspirational.

Community-level prevention — engaging men and boys, challenging harmful norms, supporting local civil society — is also essential and complements accountability efforts. Survivor-led advocacy, including through peer survivor networks like SEMA, plays a documented role in norm change at community and national levels.

CRSV as a Strategic Blind Spot

As defense budgets across NATO member states rise sharply, it is imperative that this increase is paired with proportional investment in CRSV prevention and survivor support. NATO states are investing billions in drones, tanks, and missiles — but allocating nothing to prevent or defend against conflict-related sexual violence, one of the most consistently and deliberately deployed weapons in modern warfare. CRSV is not a side effect of conflict; it is a strategic instrument used to terrorise populations, trigger displacement, and destroy communities' will to resist. Failing to integrate CRSV prevention into military doctrine, training, and threat assessments creates operational blind spots, undermines civilian trust, and hands adversaries a propaganda advantage. This is not only a humanitarian argument — it is a military readiness argument.

Recommendations to the Netherlands

- **Fund holistic, survivor-centred care** structurally and predictably — covering all four pillars of holistic care, not only emergency medical response. Short-term, project-based funding undermines the long-term work that recovery requires.
- **Invest in survivor networks and peer-to-peer programmes**, including the SEMA Global Network, as a recognised and strategic component of survivor support — not a soft add-on.
- In all relevant multilateral forums, deploy Dutch diplomatic influence **to close the gap** between existing legal obligations and their implementation. This means concrete action: by supporting or initiating cases at the International Court of Justice — as demonstrated by the ICJ case brought by The Gambia against Myanmar for atrocities including sexual violence against the Rohingya people; calling for targeted sanctions — the UN Security Council and EU have demonstrated a willingness to designate individuals for sanctions on the basis of CRSV, and this tool must be used more consistently and ambitiously; and pressing for stronger monitoring and enforcement of state obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.
- **Ensure survivor participation** in any Dutch-funded CRSV programmes, from design through to evaluation, in line with the principle of “Nothing about us, without us.”
- **Pair every increase in defense spending with proportional investment in CRSV prevention and survivor support** — treating CRSV not as a humanitarian side-issue but as a strategic security priority. Concretely, this means embedding CRSV prevention in military doctrine and training, integrating CRSV risk indicators into operational threat assessments, and ensuring structural funding for survivor care and accountability mechanisms as a recognised line item in defense and development budgets.

Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are organising, advocating and demanding accountability right now. The question before this committee is whether the Netherlands is prepared to match its stated values with the structural, long-term commitments that survivors deserve.