Céline Bardet at the Stand Speak Rise Up! gala in Biarritz, 2022

Innovating to respond better: using digital technology to help victims of conflict-related sexual violence

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Sexual violence in conflict, also known as "war rape", is a timeless phenomenon that is almost endemic to all contemporary conflicts. These rapes are crimes. Acts of conflict-related sexual violence can be a political and/or military strategy in their own right. Conflicts and the resulting lawless instability (including along migration routes and in refugee camps) breeds insecurity. Victims lack access to medical and legal services. The stigma and trauma that rape generates deprives survivors of a voice and a response to the crimes committed. This silence leads to impunity, which contributes to the establishment of a rape culture long after conflicts have ended.

Despite the scale of the phenomenon, these crimes are relegated to the background and remain largely unpunished, due to a lack of evidence and, above all, a lack of adequate approaches. Indeed, **even if this phenomenon is increasingly publicised in the media and awareness is being raised, the reality on the ground contrasts with this global awareness**.

War rape is not decreasing. There is no database available on the scale of the problem, the perpetrators of these crimes, the number of victims, etc. War rape poses many problems that have not been addressed in practice. There is a difficulty in accessing services, evidence is not safeguarded, there is a reluctance of victims to come forward because of stigma, trauma, ineffective structures and services, victims may be unwilling to be confronted by their attackers when filing complaints, and so on.

Based on these findings, the organisation We are NOT Weapons of War (WWoW) is particularly interested in using new technologies to serve the general public interest and victims themselves. **The organisation has developed a secure mobile site, BackUp, which is the first tool ever to be created which is entirely dedicated to the fight against conflict-related sexual violence**. It is a cross-cutting concept built around three functions: a) a web application for reporting crimes and identification, for use by survivors (to enable them to give testimony and be assisted by local and international organisations offering medical, psychosocial and judicial services), for relatives, and for witnesses; b) BackOffice, a crime analysis tool which collects, centralises and secures the data received which will then be classified and analysed using artificial intelligence tools and the blockchain; and c) a professional collaborative platform that works in tandem with a mobile web-application, which, by means of private access, makes it possible to create a network of experts who can be mobilised rapidly.

The pooling and authentication of the resources collected and shared will in the short term enable the creation of the first global Observatory on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (OIVSC). Such a body does not exist. BackUp therefore aims to ensure the preservation of evidence, strengthen legal action, facilitate greater capacity to reach victims, but above all, to give a voice to survivors worldwide.

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