

## Justice for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Advancing Implementation Through Survivor-Led Advocacy

CSW70 Side Event  
New York City



Hosted by:

Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation in collaboration with SEMA, the Global Network of CSRV Survivors, Permanent Missions of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Ukraine (TBC) to the United Nations

**Date & Time:** 12 March 2026, 8:30-9:45 am. Breakfast opens at 8:15. Coffee will be served after the event.

**Venue:** Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations, 666 Third Avenue, 18th floor (between 42<sup>nd</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup> Streets), New York 10017

**Runtime:** 1 hour and 15 minutes

## Introduction

The priority theme of the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) focuses on *ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers that prevent justice from being realised in practice.*

Against this backdrop, this event seeks to draw attention to the persistent gap that exists between the international legal obligations of States related to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and their effective implementation, leaving survivors with a profound feeling of injustice. While important progress has been made over the past two decades in establishing international and domestic legal frameworks addressing CRSV, justice for survivors too often remains a paper commitment, with very little impact on their lives and largely disconnected from their own understanding of what meaningful justice entails. In many contexts, survivors continue to face serious obstacles to the fulfilment of their rights, including their right to access justice, to obtain reparations and redress, and to access holistic care. Taken together, these challenges point to a systemic gap between legal commitments and their implementation and underscore the crucial role of survivor engagement in addressing these failures.

Therefore, in this side event, we will hear directly from survivors about the importance of timely and meaningful survivor engagement in shaping relevant and effective justice processes. By centring survivor perspectives and lived experience, the discussion aims to highlight lessons learned and best practices, particularly from Nepal, Ukraine, and Myanmar, and provide practical recommendations for States to implement their obligations related to CRSV in a way that is survivor-centred and responsive to survivors' needs.

At the **global level**, the [Global Network of Victims and Survivors to End Wartime Sexual Violence](#) brings together survivors from 29 countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe, connecting local and global efforts to address CRSV. Initiated in 2017 by the [Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation](#), SEMA advances survivor-led advocacy, peer exchange, and collective action to strengthen survivors' ability to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes relevant to CRSV. Working closely with SEMA, the Red Line Initiative, launched by the Mukwege Foundation, has developed several tools to support State accountability. Its first resource, the [Guidebook on State Obligations for Conflict-related Sexual Violence](#), sets out States' existing obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Building on the Guidebook, the Red Line Initiative supported SEMA in developing a survivor-led [Call to Action](#) in which SEMA members articulate 13 concrete demands directed at States and the international community to end CRSV. Together, these tools not only clarify States' legal commitments, but also provide a roadmap for implementing those commitments in a survivor-centred manner.

In **Nepal**, survivors of CRSV from the 1996–2006 armed conflict have faced decades of neglect and exclusion within the country’s transitional justice process. SEMA member Devi Khadka and the survivor organisation she founded, the Aparajit Foundation, have continuously advocated for the recognition of CRSV survivors within the transitional justice framework. Eighteen years after the process began, this advocacy resulted in a critical shift. In 2024, Nepal’s Parliament adopted a historic amendment to the Transitional Justice Act that, for the first time, explicitly recognised CRSV survivors within the transitional justice framework. However, survivors were not consulted in the design of these mechanisms, and their exclusion resulted in a process largely disconnected from survivors’ lived realities. Although the appointment of a new Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in May 2025 opened a long-awaited window for survivors to submit cases, the registration process remained deeply flawed and risked excluding many survivors from participation. In response, Devi and the Aparajit Foundation supported survivors to navigate the complex registration process, resulting in the submission of close to 4,000 cases to the TRC.

In **Ukraine**, survivor-led engagement has shaped a justice response that recognises survivors of CRSV and provides for reparations, even as the conflict continues. In November 2024, Parliament adopted Law No. 4067-IX (the Bardina Law), formally recognising CRSV survivors and establishing access to reparations—including psychological support, medical care, and financial assistance—without requiring lengthy court proceedings or excessive documentation. Survivors, including members of SEMA Ukraine, played a central role in shaping and advancing the legislation through direct engagement with lawmakers. Their advocacy has continued beyond its adoption. In November 2025, Ukrainian survivors presented a [Call to Action](#) outlining concrete demands to the Government of Ukraine and the international community on prevention, accountability, survivor support, and reparations.

In the context of the Rohingya crisis from **Myanmar**, survivors have played a critical role in advancing international justice efforts while continuing to face displacement, insecurity, and limited access to services. A historic milestone was reached in January 2026, when the full merits hearings began in the genocide case of *The Gambia v. Myanmar* before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In what is rare for an inter-State proceeding, victims were allowed to testify in Court. They provided first-hand harrowing accounts of genocidal acts and sexual violence they suffered. The Rohingya witnesses’ delegation was supported by Legal Action Worldwide (LAW), who travelled with them from the camps in Cox’s Bazar. LAW also facilitated the travel of a victims’ delegation, to ensure meaningful Rohingya representation in court and enable the Rohingya representatives to engage in public events and with the media to raise awareness on the case and their plight for justice. The two delegations included men, women, and hijra (transgender) individuals. LAW’s survivor-led approach – including the network of community-based “Survivor Advocates” they support – has helped bridge the gap between international legal mechanisms and affected communities, strengthening survivors’ agency and contributing to more meaningful pathways to accountability.

## Objectives

The aims of this side event are to:

1. Hear directly from survivors of CRSV on how justice and accountability are experienced in practice, drawing from their lived realities from the global level and national contexts, particularly Nepal and Ukraine.
2. Highlight the role of survivor-led engagement, networks, and tools in strengthening the compliance of State obligations on CRSV and identify practical pathways for States to translate legal commitments into action that is meaningful and survivor-responsive in practice.

## Run of Show

**Session length:** 1 hour and 15 minutes

### **Opening remarks**

- **Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** (3 minutes)
- **Permanent Mission of Ukraine (TBC)** (3 minutes)

### **Panel Discussion**

Moderator: Katrien Coppens, Executive Director, Mukwege Foundation

Panel members

- SEMA member Tatiana Mukanire, Democratic Republic of the Congo – representing SEMA Global
- SEMA member Alisa Kovalenko, Ukraine
- SEMA member Devi Khadka, Nepal
- Antonia Mulvey, Founder and Executive Director, Legal Action Worldwide

### **Q&A**

## Background

**The Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation** was founded in 2016. Based in The Hague, with offices in the Central African Republic, Ukraine and Burundi, we are an international, survivor-centred, rights-based organisation working to change the response to conflict-related sexual violence. The Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation supports survivors' demands for a world where sexual violence as a weapon of war is no longer tolerated and bears consequences for individual perpetrators and states. We work for a future where survivors receive the holistic care and compensation they need to rebuild their lives. We create opportunities for survivors to speak out and be heard, and where they can organise to create change, influence policies, and demand justice and accountability. Our approach is survivor-centred and human rights-based. That means that survivors themselves define their needs and solutions: *Nothing about us without us!*

**SEMA, the Global Network of Victims and Survivors to End Wartime Sexual Violence**, was initiated in 2017 by the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation. The network originated from the first global retreat of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Geneva, Switzerland, where representatives from 14 countries agreed on the need for a global network of survivors to facilitate knowledge exchange, promote solidarity and advocate for real change and the promotion of survivors' rights. Now active in 29 countries across Asia, Africa, South America, the Middle East, and Europe. SEMA connects local and global efforts to address conflict-related sexual violence. SEMA members have joined key international and national discussions on peace and security. They influence policies and programmes by advocating for changes in how we address sexual violence in conflict.

**Legal Action Worldwide (LAW)** is an independent global organization that provides innovative legal assistance to survivors of human rights violations and advocates for accountability in some of the world's most challenging contexts. Headquartered in Geneva, with offices in Nairobi, Beirut, Chiang Mai,



Cox's Bazaar, and New York, LAW has played a leading role in researching and exposing human rights violations in numerous countries. LAW's areas of focus include addressing discriminations, ending impunity, securing transformative justice and strengthening access to justice and the rule of law, providing expertise in areas including gender equality and gender-based violence, accountability and the rule of law, atrocities against aid workers, and child victims. Using creative and survivor-centred legal strategies, LAW has represented victims and survivors of international atrocity crimes in multiple national jurisdictions, including in 2023 supporting Rohingya witnesses to testify in the universal jurisdiction case against senior Myanmar officials ongoing in Argentina, as well as in front of international courts and mechanisms, including the ICJ, ICC, and various treaty bodies.