

Victims Of Sexual Violence In The Rome Statute

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Abstract:

The Rome Statute provides a remarkable legal framework for addressing sexual violence as a serious international crime. Sexual violence is explicitly recognized under the Statute, which takes the need for protection and participation in the trial as a priority. hence, Victims of sexual violence are granted the right to testify, participate in proceedings, and receive reparations, ensuring their voices are heard within international justice. Additionally, the Statute mandates the establishment of legal safeguards to protect victims from re-traumatization, including measures for confidentiality and security. Through these provisions, the Rome Statute seeks to hold perpetrators accountable while promoting justice, healing, and the restoration of dignity for survivors of sexual violence.

key words:

Rome Statute- Sexual violence- Victims' rights- Reparations- protection – participation.

Introduction:

Since the dawn of history, the world has witnessed mass atrocities and the suffering of whole societies because of international crimes without applying accountability to criminals which causes the spread of impunity. Later, the international community sought to establish judicial bodies that focused on the perpetrator without considering the victims as an affected side of these violations.

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Over the last three decades, several highly publicized cases of armed conflict, unrest, and human rights abuses have garnered massive media attention and spurred global popular mobilization aimed at initiating the restoration of victims:

The international community has focused significant attention on the subject of the legal status of victims in parallel with its goals to convict criminals and avoid impunity. The non-permanent judicial bodies before the establishment of the International Criminal Court in their hearing or trial sessions sought to guarantee general rights for the victims of sexual violence.

In meetings, The International Law Commission's works were focused on mass atrocities and serious violations, including the widespread acts of sexual violence. This led to the seeking of Rome statute to achieve protection for these crimes' victims according to the gravity of these conducts and the persecution committed on victims in some categories, also because these crimes were not criminalized before Ad-hoc tribunals.

This illustrates that the importance of the study stems from the previous information, It addresses vital issues relevant to the rights of victims of sexual violence and their enforcement in the jurisprudence of the court during the years of exercising its jurisdiction over these crimes.

According to the previous information: **How does the Rome Statute protect victims of sexual violence?** To answer this question this study required the descriptive research method in the part of defining of sexual violence crimes and the rights of victims also in the categories of this crime. the analytical method has been used to study the legal texts that are related to the subject as international instruments, case law, and international frameworks.

this study sought to identify the contexts within which the victims of sexual violence occur in the opening section, while the succeeding section casts the broad conceptual and interpretative net over this very subject matter, dividing the research into two main sections:

Section I: The Concept of Sexual Violence Victims**Section II: The Role of Sexual Violence Victims In The Rome Statute****Section I: The Concept of Sexual Violence Victims**

Criminalizing various sexual acts that qualify as international crimes was a main consideration for the international courts, especially in the context of protecting women and children, considering these groups as vulnerable populations that deserve serious care.

A) Definition Of Sexual Violence Victims: it is required to surround these terms to enhance the concept of **Sexual Violence Victims**.

1/ Definition Of Victims: The lack of an international concept of victims exists in either international or domestic law except for some basic elements that the international agreements provide it¹. Some instruments define victims as individuals or groups who have suffered harm due to a crime, which may include physical, emotional, or psychological injury, as well as financial losses or the significant denial of their fundamental rights. This is considered a crucial development in the victim's status established for them and the recommendations adopted by national systems to improve their conditions and protect them. It is noteworthy that since the declaration was adopted by the General Assembly, which includes all countries.

The Rome Statute defines victims as individuals who have experienced harm due to international crimes. It expressed the concept of harm in its ruling on the Thomas Lubanga Dyilo case. Therefore, it allows both direct and indirect victims to be recognized.

This approach broadens the definition of a victim, acknowledging individuals as victims even if the perpetrator is unknown, and extends this recognition to close family members or others who may have suffered harm while assisting the direct victims.

¹ A. V Bogdandy and R. Wolfrum, Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law, Volume 14, Netherlands, 2010, p 8.

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2/ Definition of sexual violence: defined as any act of gender-based violence, whether in public or private life, that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual, or psychological injury or suffering for victims, including threats of such actions, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty

The term sexual violence expresses Acts with a sexual component that happen by force and coercion and result from psychological abuse or the fear of violence, regardless of gender or age. It also involves taking advantage of forceful situations or the victim's incapacity to agree, both of which are examples of coercion. In contrast to rape, when the perpetrator's goal is to coerce the victim into having sex with them, sexual violence aims to coerce the victim into engaging in a sexual act or behavior, which does not need to involve the offender, other definitions of sexual describe violence as an effort to engage in forceful, religiously or morally objectionable sexual conduct. Psychological intimidation, blackmail, and other forms of compulsion are considered forms of violence. It also happens when the offender is mentally ill or drugged¹. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda enhances that sexual violence is a sexual act under coercive circumstances against individuals.

The Rome Statute classifies many acts considered as severe forms of sexual violence, as crimes under its jurisdiction. However, the list is not comprehensive, and the statute does not specify a clear threshold for what constitutes sexual violence, Legal precedents and scholarly work have identified additional acts that might classified as sexual violence, such as genital mutilation, forced abortions, coerced undressing, virginity testing, and involuntary public exposure. These acts have also been recognized as constituting sexual violence within international law.

¹ Sexual Violence Against Women: Its Forms and Ways to Address It, available at the palstinian center for democracy and conflict resolution : <https://pcdcr.org/arabic/?p=3823>

B) Sexual Violence as An International Crime:

the International Criminal Court emphasizes such types of sexual violence in certain categories.

1/The Legal Classification of Sexual Violence In the International Criminal Court: It takes two divisions;

1.1- The crime against humanity of Sexual Violence : The crimes against humanity was used in a contemporary context due to the Turkish crimes against the Armenians in 1915, after that when the London Charter in 1945 mentioned it as one of the crimes over which the Nuremberg Military Tribunals exercised jurisdiction to prosecute the Nazis. This led to widespread criticism due to the principle of *nulla crimen sine lege*¹.

Due to the absence of a specific legal definition, legal scholars have sought to establish one. For instance, some have described it as a systematic strategy involving numerous violent acts aimed at dismantling the social foundations of national groups. This approach seeks to obliterate their social, political, cultural, linguistic, and religious identities, ultimately infringing upon the personal freedoms of individuals within these groups.

The International Criminal Court also refers to a series of widespread acts committed against civilians with intent, including homicide, torture, racism, and persecution as crimes against humanity. Regarding sexual violence, The statute addresses this in Article 7 which lists several acts, including different types of sexual.

Practically, This offense was recognized as a crime against humanity in ad-hoc tribunals, both of them asserted their authority to charge this conduct in cases under their jurisdiction over “other inhumane acts.”²

¹ W. A. SCHABAS, *AN INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT*, Cambridge University Press, the United States of America, 2004, p49.

² A. M. Banks, *Sexual Violence and International Criminal Law: An Analysis of the Ad Hoc Tribunal's Jurisprudence & the International Criminal Court's Elements of Crimes*, Faculty Publication, 2005, p7.

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In a similar vein, rape was one of the International Criminal Court convictions of Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, and sentenced to 18 years in prison.

1.2- The war crime of Sexual Violence: war crimes do not require a pattern of widespread or systematic conduct, even a singular isolated incident can be classified as a war crime. The existence of armed conflict is what prompts international scrutiny in the context of war crimes legislation, including occupations, against individuals or property protected by the relevant provisions. Two key elements emerge from this, the crime context and the targeted individuals or property¹.

In general, war crimes are committed against civilians and non-civilian habitats or civilian objects because they are targets during armed conflicts either national or international conflict. Hence, the protection needs to criminalize breaches that violate the international custom of war and involve many types of acts, and sexual violence is one of them .

2/Forms of Sexual Violence as an international crime

sexual violence is categorized in several forms into two types:

2.1- Physical acts of sexual violence: it includes many forms of this crime according to the conduct:

- **Rape:** There was no definition of rape. However, it refers to a physical violation of a sexual nature committed against a person under circumstances characterized by coercion and sexual violence that relies on intimidation. Rape is not only perpetrated through physical violence but also through threats, intimidation, extortion, and other forms of coercion².

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in its judgment over *kayasuku* case mentioned rape instead of trying to describe in detail the individual actions that comprise the *actus reus* of rape which is defined without attempting to reduce it to a simplistic or mechanical description of body parts or physical actions³.

¹ K. Ambos, The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. C.H.BECK; Nomos, 2015, p326.

² Ibid, p309.

³ G. BOAS and others, *ELEMENTS OF CRIMES UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008, p119.

- **sexual slavery:** The necessity to criminalize sexual slavery in a statute of a judicial body like the Rome Statute. It is not only reflected the global interest in sexual slavery as a complicated and widespread issue, moreover, it also provided a more beneficial way to describe damages that might have been categorized under other forms of exploitation. The inclusion of sexual slavery allowed and encouraged legislators in the Rome Conference for a clear articulation of acts where the perpetrator exercises control akin to ownership over a victim, forcing them to engage in sexual acts. This definition effectively ties sexual slavery to the well-established and universally condemned crime of enslavement, reinforcing its gravity and the need for legal accountability¹.

In this context, the term 'sexual' includes restrictions on autonomy, freedom of movement, and the ability to make decisions about one's sexual activities, such as forced marriage, domestic servitude, or other forms of compulsory labor that ultimately lead to coerced sexual acts, including rape by their captors², in practice, sexual slavery have been charged in a few cases at the court but no one had a conviction for it.

- **enforced prostitution:** Refers to a situation in which the victim is unable to alter their immediate circumstances, regardless of how they initially became trapped in these conditions. In this context, the individual is unable to escape, enduring continuous sexual violence and exploitation³.

This crime in the Rome Statute was designed to cover situations that do not fully meet the criteria for slavery-like conditions. The crime of enforced prostitution could encompass circumstances where a person is coerced into engaging in sexual acts to secure essential needs for survival or to prevent further harm. These situations may not necessarily qualify as slavery or enslavement, and may also fall outside the scope of rape if they do not involve clear coercion, force, or threats of force⁴.

- **forced pregnancy:** the Appeal Chamber Of The International Criminal Court used this term to refer to illegal

¹ V.Oosterveld, Sexual Slavery and the International Criminal Court: Advancing International Law. *Michigan Journal of International Law*, 25(605), 2004,607.

² K. Ambos, op.cit, p213.

³ N. V, Demleitner, Forced Prostitution: Naming an International Offense. *Fordham International Law Journal*, 18(1), 1994,p179.

⁴ K. Ambos, op.cit, p215.

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confinement and forced impregnation of individuals¹, As a judicial precedent in international criminal law, It is noted that efforts to compel Bosnian Muslim women to have 'Serbian children' were the main driving force behind the foundation of prosecuting this crime².

- **Enforced sterilization:** A system of controlling reproduction within a targeted group, as defined by Article 6 of the Rome Statute. This crime occurs when a perpetrator permanently deprives one or more individuals of their reproductive capabilities, under circumstances where the procedure is not medically justified and is carried out without the victim's true consent. The historical practices in Nazi Germany were a key reference point in shaping the legal discussions surrounding this crime in international law³.

2.2– Non-Physical acts of sexual violence: sexual violence seems to involve more than physical harm. The International Criminal Court goes with this hypothesis because it covers any serious sexual assault that does not involve penetration.

This includes all forms of sexual abuse that violate a person's physical and moral integrity through Coercion, threats, or intimidation that degrade and humiliate the victim and should be considered acts of comparable gravity. For example sexual harassment, which refers to any unwelcome sexual behavior that is likely to cause offense or humiliation.

Section II: The Role of Sexual Violence Victims in the Rome Statute

The very presence of such sexual violence and inclusion thereof as prosecutable crimes alongside such war crimes as murder and torture can achieve some justice for them but they need an appropriate framework.

A) Rights of sexual violence victims before International Criminal Court: The Rome Statute grants a range of rights to victims, with its provisions particularly focused on ensuring protection for those affected by sexual violence crimes.

1. participation of victim:

Before an individual can be permitted to participate as a sexual violence victim in an International Criminal Court trial, to be

¹ Case Of The Prosecutor V. Dominic Ongwen, ICC-02/04-01/15, 2011.

² R. Grey, The ICC's First 'Forced Pregnancy' Case in Historical Perspective. *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 15, 2017, p 919.

³ Ibid, p920.

recognized as a victim, an individual must achieve the conditions in the Rome Statute¹.

1.1- Participation in the Pre-trial investigations: The testimony of victims is one of the resources of prosecutor to exercise his authority under *proprio mutui*, this requirement is logical, as victims cannot participate in proceedings they are unaware of. Consequently, the rules stipulate that the Prosecutor must inform victims of their intention to seek approval from the Pre-Trial Chamber to begin an investigation.

It provides important source for the prosecutor at the preliminary examination stage occurs before the actual investigation and usually relies heavily on witness testimony.² It was applied in the two cases of the *proprio mutui* activation in Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire

The Pre-Trial Chamber instructed the Victim's Participation and Reparations into a comprehensive report. These reports played a crucial role in the Pre-Trial Chamber's decision as to whether it would permit or not for the Prosecutor's requests for attempting investigation because some information in them was considered to corroborate the Prosecutor's submissions. In many cases, he/she relied on victims and their participation to ensure more evidence and information.

1.2 - The victim's general participatory right: in the Rome Statute, Article 68(3) establishes a fundamental right for victims which is the ability to take part in international criminal proceedings, granting them the opportunity to engage at different stages of the trial.

Chambers of the court did not comply with a certain method of interpreting this article, while the pre-trial chambers and the Appeals Chamber limited participation to victims of the specific crimes outlined in the indictment because the wording provided no definition or guidance for interpretation, the first trial chamber to consider victim participation during trial proceedings rejected this approach, and the right was later broadened to include victims of any crime³.

Scholars have widely asserted that all the standards specified in Article 68 apply in the three chambers, This understanding was

¹ B.Horsten, & S.Christoph, *Victims of International Crimes: An Interdisciplinary Discourse*, Asser press, The Hague, 2013, p50.

² K. Ambos, op.cit, p735.

³ B.Thorsten, & S.Christoph, op-cit, p54.

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established during the Rome Conference, where international legislators reached an agreement on Article 68 and its title¹.

1.3 - Victim Involvement in Jurisdictional or Admissibility Disputes: According to Article 68 wording, victims are allowed to present their observations to the court when the proceeding is related to the Article 19.

The right of victims to submit observations at this stage is not contingent upon Article 68(3). As such, their participation is not subject to the "personal interests" requirement, and the Court does not have discretionary authority to determine whether their participation is appropriate. Once again, this right is unconditional, but it is restricted to victims who have already contacted the Court².

2/ Victims reparations: Whether individuals or legal entities, The International Criminal Court has the authority to examine the harm suffered by victims. Logically, however, victims of sexual violence are primarily individuals, meaning that the right to reparation is generally limited to them.

In sexual violence crimes, the reparation should respect some aspects such as gender-sensitive in reparations proceedings, the court acknowledged this approach when referring to victim protection, and it is expected that this perspective should be applied when assessing the scope of harm suffered by victims, which could then influence reparations decisions. Additionally, this approach should encourage victim participation in reparations proceedings. Reparation measures should therefore prioritize physical and psychological rehabilitation programs that address the specific harms faced by women and girls, facilitating their reintegration into society³.

2.1- forms of reparations in the International Criminal Court :

Reparation programs are a complex topic that can generally be divided into two main categories: material reparations and symbolic reparations. These can be applied either collectively or individually.

¹ K. Ambos, op.cit, p1686.

² B.Gideon, and others, B.Gideon, and others, International Criminal Procedure, Cambridge university press, new York, 2011, p315.

³ S. Kabalira, The Right To Reparations Under The Rome Statute Of The International Criminal Court, PhD thesis, La Sapienza University, Rome, 2014, p88.

Rehabilitation differs from financial compensation or legal sanctions aimed at perpetrators. Instead, it focuses on measures that seek to restore victims' respect within society. This can take various forms, including public apologies, official acknowledgment of the injustices suffered by victims, commemorative events, mention of victims in official ceremonies, or other forms such as memorials, also it might involve psychological and social support for the sexual violence victims.

Material reparation involves the restoration of rights to facilitate their social reintegration, returning confiscated property, or ensuring their ability to participate fully in society after the crimes, also Financial Compensation means the monetary compensation given to victims to address the harm they have suffered. It can cover physical, psychological, and material damages caused by the crimes.

- **Individual Awards:** Individual reparations are useful in cases where crimes affect a small or distinct group of victims, as collective awards may not be suitable. Typically, these reparations are monetary and aim to address specific harm. However, making court-ordered individual awards can be costly and impractical in some cases. If the ICC is unable to directly award reparations, it may delegate this responsibility to the Trust Fund for Victims (TFV), which follows standardized criteria. While this approach can help distribute awards, it may result in less individualized reparations compared to those issued directly by the Court. So this form might be applied in sexual violence cases because the harm here is not collective according to the conduct perpetrated.

In this context, Judges must among other things, assess the convicted individual's ability to provide reparations based on their assets and potential to generate income or other intangible resources¹.

- **Collective Awards:** In individual reparation there is a significant risk that individual awards may not adequately remedy the harm, especially in cases of widespread victimization. Additionally, individual reparations could be impractical to implement, leaving many equally harmed victims excluded. Therefore, collective

¹ K. Ambos, op.cit, p1863.

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reparations are often a more realistic and effective way to address the harm caused by international crimes. Collective reparations can be tailored to the needs of victimized groups, offering flexibility in the form of financial or symbolic remedies, and can better address the widespread nature of the harm. This approach is especially useful for unidentified victims who cannot claim reparations individually¹.

The International Criminal Court faces significant challenges in ordering collective reparations. One of the main issues is the limitation of financial resources which may prevent full reparation for all victims, from both the perpetrated individual or the Trust Fund for Victims, also a large number of victims makes addressing cases difficult.

The Court has the authority to order collective reparations under the Rome Statute, especially when the number of victims is high. However, these measures may be resisted by victims who feel their suffering is not acknowledged, highlighting the need for a balance between collective and individual reparations. Additionally, victims' trauma, financial hardship, and ongoing violence in post-conflict areas complicate their participation in the proceedings, further reinforcing the need for flexible, collective approaches to redress².

B) Victim's Guarantees of Participation and Reparation

For Sexual Violence Crimes: At various stages, both participation and reparation require guarantees to ensure that victims can effectively exercise these rights.

1- Representation: once an individual or organization is recognized as a victim, they are entitled to legal representation before the Court. Victims can choose their own representatives, or if there is a large group, the Court may appoint a common representative.

If victims cannot afford representation, financial assistance may be provided. Legal representatives can participate in Court proceedings, though their role is subject to the Court's discretion, which may limit their participation to observations or written

¹ M. Aberg, The Reparations Regime of the International Criminal Court. Retrieved from UMEA UNIVERSITY: seen at 16:00 on 12/10/2024.

<https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:801293/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

² Sylvain Aubry, M. I.-T. (2011). Collective Reparations and the International Criminal Court. Retrieved from the University of Essex:
<https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r26682.pdf>.

submissions. They may also question witnesses with the Court's approval. Victims and their representatives are entitled to receive notifications about the investigation¹.

The Office for Public Counsel for Victims was founded in September 2005. Over time, the office has evolved into a vital intermediary for victims, their representatives, and the Court. Additionally, its members serve as representatives for victims who are not adequately represented².

if associations were allowed to represent the interests of individual victims, reasonable assumptions could be made based on the non-profit status of such organizations. Additionally, the cost of legal aid provided to an association representing a large number of victims would be the same as that for representing a single victim³.

Legal counsel for victims must maintain ongoing communication, often in the field, and develop an understanding of local contexts, while fostering a strong, empathetic connection with the victims' perspectives and concerns. Unfortunately, this has led to significant financial pressures on legal aid funding for victims, as State Parties have pushed for cost reductions. In fact It's important to note that, in the experience of ad hoc international tribunals, there are no costs related to victim representation. In these tribunals, the financial resources allocated for legal aid typically account for more than 20 percent of the annual budget efforts must be made to reconcile these two aspects of the current system for victim representation before the court.

Victims participating in Court include legal representation and assistance, so it has significantly increased the litigation costs upon the court, this led it to be a major "cost-driver."⁴

¹ B.Thorsten, & S.Christoph, Op-cit, p 52.

² Ibid, p 53.

³ R.Bellelli, (2010). *International Criminal Justice law and Practice from the rome statute to Its review*. england: ashgate Publishing limited

⁴ C. Montserrat, D. Carlens. *Enhancing Victims' Rights Before the ICC*, fidh, france, 2013, p20.

2- protection:

The court takes the safety of sexual violence victims as one of its responsibilities, So It makes serious efforts to protect with a set of protocols designed to shield individuals from potential threats or harm following a crime or during the trial process. The aim is to create a secure environment for victims, allowing them to participate in legal proceedings without fear of retaliation or intimidation. These protective measures may include restraining orders, support services, safe housing options, and the guarantee of using video conference technology to ensure anonymous testimony, designed for case by case.

The court -as an international judicial body- has founded a framework for the progressive development of law governing, this broader operations of criminal justice systems have been shaped by early court cases that emphasized the significance of this provision, sparking detailed legal discussions surrounding its interpretation during the Court's first eleven and a half years of operation. This provision focuses on the protection of certain victims and witnesses facing severe risks, particularly due to the nature of the crimes, such as those involving sexual violence, among others.

Conclusion

This paper explained how The International Criminal Court sought to provide justice for sexual violence victims in its statute with a legal framework involving a group of procedures that guaranteed the essential rights of a victim.

These results enhance the main ideas of this paper:

- The International Criminal Court gives guarantees for sexual violence victims to achieve reparation but the number of victims seems disproportionately compared to the real damage.

- Article 68 includes ambiguity because it provides general ideas about victims' representation without deep consideration of essential issues.

- The system of protecting victims needs more illustrations to achieve effectiveness because of the absence of accuracy in the aspects and approaches to assist the prosecutor while he is making his

decision about the procedures in sexual violence crimes to prevent victims from any harm, damage, or risk.

So, these suggestions could be recommended to avoid errors in the current system about sexual violence victims:

- The framework related to victims of sexual violence must be reviewed, avoiding generalizations in the provisions addressing this issue.

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