

Why is the U.S. Waging War on Women Raped in War?

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[Mandatory sonograms](#), forced lectures by doctors, humiliating permission slips from abusive husbands, paternalistic opinions from Supreme Court Justice Kennedy, uneducated and patently stupid soundbites from [Tea Partiers](#). That's not the worst. In this newest wave of the war on



women, let's not forget the U.S. government's abortion policies toward women in war.

Rape is systematically being used as a weapon of war in conflicts worldwide. During the Rwandan genocide it is estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped in 100 days and that approximately [20,000 children were born as a result of rape](#). Recent reports from Burma indicate that Burmese soldiers have [orders to rape](#) women. [387 civilians were raped in Walikale, North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\) in a 4 day period last year](#). In 2008 alone, the U.N. Population Fund recorded 16,000 cases of rape in DRC, two-thirds of them adolescent girls and other children, in an area where rape is vastly underreported. Imagine what the real numbers are.

The stigma associated with rape ostracizes girls and women, particularly those who become pregnant, because they are often seen as carrying the enemy's child. They are frequently abandoned by their communities, [struggling](#) for ways of living with children born out of rape. That is, if they survive childbirth. The maternal mortality ratio in eastern DRC is estimated at [3,000 deaths per 100,000 live births](#) (compare that with 24 deaths per 100,000 live births in the U.S. and 5 deaths per 100,000 live births in Denmark).

How does the U.S. address this emergency? Under the 1973 Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, and [subsequent policy by the Bush Administration](#), the U.S. prohibits any federal foreign assistance from being used to even mention abortion as an option to women raped in armed conflict. The current incarnation of these restrictions go beyond statutory requirements because the statute is limited to restricting the provision of abortion "as a method of family planning." [Rape is never family planning](#). The repeal of the Global Gag Rule [did not affect these restrictions](#).

This U.S. policy stands in stark contrast to the development policies of other prominent donors and even its own domestic policy. As much as [some Tea Partiers](#) wish it wasn't so, the domestic equivalent of these restrictions (the Hyde Amendment) [does contain a rape exception](#). The United Kingdom, with a ruling conservative party, recognizes [the need to provide abortions](#) in conflicts in which rape and forced pregnancy are used as weapons of war. [Norway formally recommended](#) that the U.S. remove its restriction on funding to these victims during the Universal Periodic Review of the United States by the Human Rights Council.

The best an organization accepting U.S. funding can provide even to a twelve year old impregnated rape survivor hiding in the bushes of eastern Congo is a [plastic sheet and a clean knife](#) for labor. Or, if she suffers complications from having an unsafe abortion (because she doesn't have access to safe abortion services, often because of U.S. abortion restrictions), they can provide her with "[post-abortion care](#)." Giving these women "[birthing kits](#)," or lecturing them about preventative family planning, when the family they would be planning for is with a contingent of combatants armed with [guns, Viagra and orders to rape](#), is appalling. Beyond that, it violates international law.

August 12th marked the 62nd anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, which require that all persons considered "wounded and sick" in armed conflict [receive comprehensive and non-discriminatory medical care](#) dictated solely by their medical condition. Despite these protections, girls and women who are raped in armed conflict are routinely denied the option of abortion in the medical care provided to them in humanitarian medical settings. This is discriminatory and violates their rights under the Geneva Conventions. The U.S., by attaching these restrictions on humanitarian aid for rape victims in conflict, is violating the rights of these women. The urgency of this violation cannot be understated: the U.S. is the largest donor of humanitarian aid in the world, and is instrumental in preventing essential medical care to a desperately vulnerable population.

In order to bring the U.S. into compliance with the Geneva Conventions, and restore dignity to our foreign policy, President Obama must act now to ensure the rights of female rape victims in conflict. Over fifty organizations, legal academics and professionals have sent letters to President Obama as part of the [Global Justice Center's August 12 campaign](#) to remove the abortion ban for girls and women raped in armed conflict. Sign the GJC's petition urging President Obama to issue an executive order lifting these life-threatening restrictions [here](#).