

Caritas Laments Plight of Women Refugees

Requests Resources to Protect and Heal Victims

VATICAN CITY, JUNE 19, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Caritas is decrying the lack of protection for women and girls in conflict zones, and is calling on governments and international organizations to act against these injustices.

The aid agency stated this today in a message sent for World Refugee Day, which will take place Saturday.

It highlighted the plight of female refugees who are often targets of violence in war and noted a "collective failure" to protect women and girls from rape and other forms of exploitation.

Martina Liebsch, coordinator of the migration and trafficking advocacy team, stated: "Humiliating women through violence and abuse is a common feature in armed conflicts around the world today.

"Women are often the last to leave as they stay to look after their families. This makes them vulnerable and subject to violence."

The communiqué reported that in Colombia, 17.7% of women who flee their homes reported sexual violence as the cause.

Women and girls who ran from violence in Sri Lanka reported fear of violence in the overcrowded refugee camps, and a lack of privacy which often leads to abuse.

Caritas noted that in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 463 rape cases were reported in the past three months, over double the amount in that space of time last year.

Liebsch asserted that the effects of this violence are "devastating."

She explained: "Apart from the physical and psychological damage that rape brings to the individual, there is also a grave risk of unwanted pregnancy and HIV infection.

"It affects families, communities and villages. Some will never totally recover from this attack to their dignity."

"Caritas says that although the international humanitarian laws are in place that guarantee the protection of civilians, women, and children, they are not being upheld," Liebsch stated.

She called for governments and international organizations to "address this failure by improving protection, medical treatment, counseling and means for rehabilitation and compensation."

"Women should be encouraged to report on the abuses they suffered to start their healing," said Liebsch. "To do justice to their suffering their perpetrators should be brought to justice."

Caritas reported the plan to make an appeal for women and children by sending representatives from 11 countries to a June 29 U.N. consultation meeting in Geneva on the topic of refugees.

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