

A CSW 67 Virtual parallel event report

Women and Girls in Forgotten Wars

COMMISSION *on the*
STATUS OF WOMEN



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EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE
CSW67 Progress toward gender equality
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



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ABOUT THE EVENT

A virtual parallel event held during the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) co-hosted by Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Women's UN Report Network

THIS REPORT

Is compiled by Action on Child Early and Forced Marriage with contributions from:

- Dr Andrea Barschdorf-Hager, CEO of CARE Austria
- Walaa Allahham, Former Humanitarian Worker in Syria
- Lois Herman, Managing Director of Women's UN Report Network (WUNRN)
- Dr Mohinder Watson, Founder Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage
- Beatriz Borges, Executive Director of The Justice and Peace Center (CEPAZ), Venezuela.
- Julie Ward, Former Member of the European Parliament

For any queries regarding the Women and Girls in Forgotten Wars panel or this report, please contact: actiononchildmarriage@gmail.com

BACKGROUND TO THE 'WOMEN AND GIRLS IN FORGOTTEN WARS' PANEL

A CONCEPT NOTE DEVELOPED BY DR MOHINDER WATSON, FOUNDER ACTION ON CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Currently two billion people, or a quarter of the world's population, now lives in conflict-affected areas.[1] Death, injury, sexual violence, food and water scarcity, malnutrition, illness, disability, poverty and mental stress accompany conflict and wars. They destroy lives, livelihoods, economies, and communities, as well as homes, schools, places of work and health care facilities. Disruption to electricity and medical supplies reduces access to life saving treatments as well as essential health services including sexual and reproductive health care. There is often a reduction or total loss of law and order, forcing people to flee their homes and become refugees. [2]

Conflicts and war are gendered phenomena with women and girls being disproportionately affected[3]. Women and girls are exposed to gender-based violence (GBV), including trafficking, discrimination, arbitrary killings, torture, beatings, death threats and forced marriage. Many experience systematic rape and sexual violence used to terrorise communities. Girls are often the first to be taken out of school and forced into marriage, which has long term implications for the girls concerned and gender equality [4].

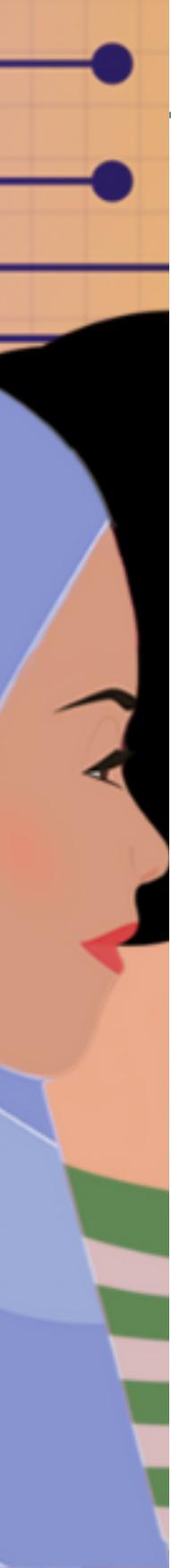
[1] UN Secretary General's press release March 2022

[2] Global Citizen

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/women-and-girls-impacts-war-conflict/>

[3] 5 Ways Conflict Prevents Girls and Women From Being Equal Everywhere

[4] OHCHR <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/womens-human-rights-and-gender-related-concerns-situations-conflict-and-instability>



The level of media coverage of conflicts and wars is extremely variable but has a significant impact on the level of humanitarian aid and support given. While the war in Ukraine generated intense media attention, public and financial support and a rapid political response, the war in the Tigray region of Ethiopia drew little media interest, public condemnation or financial and other support in comparison[1].

With the world's attention currently focused on the war in Ukraine, the plight of women and girls in other ongoing wars has largely been forgotten. There is little media coverage of Syria facing an economic crisis compounded by a decade of war, Somalia where humanitarian access has deteriorated, Myanmar where political deadlock has left millions in need and caused almost 880,000 Rohingya refugees to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of Congo where disease outbreaks are deepening the effect of the conflict, South Sudan which is facing rising regional tensions, Nigeria facing increasing insecurity across the country, Yemen suffering from the cumulative effects of protracted conflict and other crises, Afghanistan facing a catastrophic humanitarian disaster and Ethiopia where thousands have been killed and millions displaced[2]. Sudan already mired in political tensions and drought has seen an escalation of violence in recent days, highlighting the fragility of many states and the speed at which a situation can suddenly change and become a humanitarian catastrophe.

Women and girls in conflict and war become invisible, unlike men who are visible fighting on the front lines. However, women play a crucial role in caring and providing for their families with many becoming female heads of households on the death, detention or disappearance of their husbands and male relatives.

Given that women and girls are largely forgotten in many ongoing wars and conflicts, this panel of speakers from NGOs and humanitarian and human rights organisations will shine the spotlight on the plight of women and girls in war and conflict to raise awareness of their needs and to discuss potential solutions to help render them more visible and to provide more support to them.

The negative impacts of current conflicts have been further compounded by the global COVID-19 pandemic, increased fuel and energy costs due to the war in Ukraine, extreme weather events due to climate change and the recent earthquakes in Syria and Turkey.

[1] Malaka Gharib, 4.3.2022 Not every war gets the same coverage as Russia's invasion <https://www.npr.org/>

[2] International Rescue committee -The top 10 crises the world can't ignore in 2022 <https://www.rescue.org/article/top-10-crises-world-cant-ignore-2022>

This report is a summary of the key points discussed by speakers at the joint parallel event held during CSW 67 by Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Women’s UN Report Network on 9 March, 2023.



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AT THE PANEL OPENING

LOIS A. HERMAN
MANAGING DIRECTOR WUNRN,
WOMEN’S UN REPORT NETWORK

We are living in a volatile world. Though we see headlines and extensive media coverage of current wars such as Ukraine with Russia, there are a multitude of ongoing and past conflicts that have fragmented and destroyed the lives of millions of women and girls. Examples are Yemen, Myanmar, North Korea, Nigeria, Venezuela, Syria, and many more. This Panel will unpack the realities of women and girls trying to survive and cope beyond these “Forgotten Wars” and explore ways to give them support with their broad-spectrum crises as food, safe water, shelter, education, safety and security. We will widen the lens to show that Power & Profit are driving forces behind wars, and these conflicts affect women and girls in so many negative ways, such as refugee status, internal displacement, migration, poverty, sexual violence, and more. Aid and humanitarian support are often given to those in need in more visible wars.

These opening remarks by Lois Herman as the co-host and moderator of the panel were followed by speaker presentations



DR. ANDREA BARSCHDORF-HAGER
CHIEF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CARE AUSTRIA

Shared information about the often-overlooked plight of women and girls in forgotten crises and wars. Drawing on the findings of the CARE Austria Report "Breaking the silence" - Ten humanitarian crises that did not make headlines in 2022[1] she highlighted

that there were ten countries that received the least media coverage in 2022. The top three being Angola, Malawi, and Central African Republic, along with seven other countries in Sub Saharan Africa. All these countries are facing multiple crises such as hunger, drought, and/or conflict, and displacement, affecting millions of people who are in dire need of humanitarian aid. Dr Andrea Barschdorf Hager emphasized that the lack of media coverage has impacted donor decisions, especially when it comes to private fundraising and corporate donors.

She mentioned that the CARE Austria report is not an indictment but a call for everyone to learn more about these forgotten crises, share information, and get involved, especially for institutional donors. The European Union has its own budget line for forgotten crises, and it is vital that more donors follow suit.

She pointed out that in all the countries on the list, there are significant differences in how men and women are impacted by multiple crises. Women and girls often face more challenges due to patriarchal norms and structural disadvantage. Therefore, it is essential to provide tailored protection and care for all genders as a humanitarian aid organization, but CARE has a special focus on the needs of women and girls.

Dr Andrea Barschdorf Hager shared that the United Nations' annual needs assessment for 2023 shows another negative record, with an estimated 339 million people needing humanitarian assistance, a 24% increase from 2022. She mentioned that the world is currently experiencing the largest global hunger crisis in recent memory, with 828 million people not having enough to eat, and 45 million people at imminent risk of starvation.

[1] CARE Austria Report "Breaking the silence" - Ten humanitarian crises that did not make headlines in 2022.

<https://www.care-international.org/resources/breaking-silence-report-ten-humanitarian-crises-didnt-make-headlines-2022>

She also highlighted that despite this dire need, the lack of funding remains a significant problem, with only 47% of aid being funded in 2022.

To generate more attention and funding to the forgotten crises, Dr Andrea Barschdorf Hager suggested that governments should ensure access for journalists to allow independent reporting from crisis regions, international donors must provide sufficient funds to alleviate humanitarian crises, and aid organizations must invest in media work and be a trustworthy, fast source of information apart from fundraising. As CARE Austria, they have found a corporate sponsor who will fund media trips for two journalists to one of the countries listed in their Breaking the Silence Report.

Dr Andrea Barschdorf Hager emphasized that governments of countries in crises should give the media the space they need to report freely and independently, and media, in general, should pay particular attention to the participation of women and the female perspective on crises. She added that affected people should have their own say, and broader perspectives and the diversity of affected societies should be shown, including the consequences of conflict.

In conclusion, Dr Andrea Barschdorf Hager stressed that the plight of women and girls in forgotten crises and wars cannot be ignored any longer. She urged everyone to do their part in generating more attention to these crises and ensuring that aid reaches those who need it the most. She emphasized that CARE is convinced that they owe this to their fellow human beings to ensure that they are not forgotten, and that their voices are heard.



WALAA ALLAHHAM

A FORMER HUMANITARIAN WORKER
IN SYRIA

Spoke about the dire humanitarian crisis affecting women, girls, and the population at large, which has been largely ignored by the international community. She shared information about the negative impact of sanctions on women and girls in Syria.

Walaa emphasized how the protracted violence has resulted in unimaginable misery, increased humanitarian needs, and a record increase in prices of more than 800% in the last two years alone[1]. She also highlighted how the war has affected women's and girls' access to education, and how the displacement of women has been particularly acute, leading to a lack of access to life essentials.

Despite these challenges, Syrian women have taken on new roles as breadwinners and are navigating a difficult environment every day.

Walaa stressed the impact of sanctions on Syrian women's daily lives, their means of subsistence, and their access to food, medicine, and fuel. She noted that the sanctions have made it difficult to import essential goods, leading to shortages, high prices, and a decline in living standards.

Electricity and fuel shortages have made daily tasks like cooking, heating, and transportation challenging, particularly for women who have restricted access to food, medicine, and sanitary products.

The ongoing conflict in Syria has lasted for over a decade, with no end in sight. The recent earthquake in February 2023 has only increased the suffering and added to a complex humanitarian response.

Therefore, Walaa called on the international community to step up and support Syrian women and the country as a whole. She emphasized the need for increased humanitarian relief and a longer-term solution, particularly for the most vulnerable people affected by the Syrian crisis.

Walaa's call to action emphasizes how urgent it is to tend to the needs of individuals affected by the Syrian crisis, especially women and girls who still face many obstacles, and that without urgent action, the situation in Syria will only continue to deteriorate.

Her overall message was one of hope and perseverance in the face of difficulties, as she highlighted the resilience of Syrian women and their continued fight to live and support their community.

Walaa added, this panel discussion played a significant role in reminding people about the forgotten wars and promoting the rights of those who are most at risk.

[1] reliefweb report:
<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-unprecedented-rise-poverty-rate-significant-shortfall-humanitarian-aid-funding-enar>



DR MOHINDER WATSON

FOUNDER, ACTION ON CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND PANEL CO-HOST

Addressed the questions of why women and girls in certain wars and conflicts are forgotten, and the impact of conflict on women and girls, drawing in particular on a 2021 report by Amnesty International on sexual violence in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

So, why are women and girls forgotten in wars and conflicts? As conflict and war is a gendered experience men are visible fighting on the frontlines, while women are invisible in the private sphere of homes caring and providing for the family.

Due to the selectivity bias in conflict reporting in the international media, women's stories in conflict and wars are not told, and their voices are not heard. In addition, the brutality of gender-based violence (GBV) means many women and girls suffer in silence due to the shame and stigma attached to sexual violence which prevents them from telling anyone, even their own families. Certain conflicts are not prioritised on the foreign policy agenda of world leaders which keeps some conflicts 'out of sight and out of mind.' Furthermore, little data is available on women/girls in conflict and war so their numbers, location and needs are difficult to assess and so their needs remain largely unmet.

However, we are reminded that women and girls are not mere passive victims of war; they are courageous and resilient and able to adapt – whether providing for their families, fleeing to safety with their children, taking over the work and roles usually undertaken by men, or becoming female headed households.

In her second question, Mohinder addressed the question of how women and girls are harmed by war.

Despite the protection afforded to women and girls in conflict and war under the UN Security Council's Women, Peace and Security agenda and International Humanitarian Law, women and girls are still exposed to many types of harm and suffering.

Many women and girls are killed, injured, suffer the trauma and loss of loved ones, or may become separated from close family members. They face a very high risk of GBV including sexual violence, physical and psychological violence, verbal abuse as well as multiple violations of their human rights.

Sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war to assert control, weaken families, carry out ethnic cleansings and to discourage resistance and destabilize communities [1]. Many women and girls are forcibly displaced, which often disrupts or ends girls' education. They may have limited or no access to health care services including sexual and reproductive health as health infrastructure is damaged or destroyed and medical staff flee. Child marriage often increases during conflict as some parents believe this will protect their daughters from sexual violence. Many women lose their homes and livelihoods. Additionally, they carry the burden of knowing that other family members who witnessed sexual violence are also traumatized and need psychosocial and other support. The knowledge that perpetrators act with impunity and the lack of justice further hinders their healing.

Drawing on a 2021 report by Amnesty International entitled "I Don't Know If They Realized I Was A Person" about rape and other sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia [2], she shared the report's insights based on interviews with rape survivors and medical professionals who had treated patients of sexual violence.

The report highlighted that those women and girls interviewed had been subjected to multiple forms of sexual violence including rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation and torture. Most of the interviewees had been raped by multiple perpetrators. Some survivors of sexual violence were children, while others were women who were pregnant at the time of the rape. In some cases, women were assaulted in front of their children. Several women were raped with objects, beaten, threatened and verbally abused in efforts to terrorize and humiliate victims and their ethnic groups.

According to the medical professionals who had treated survivors of sexual violence, most rape victims came to them for medical help several months after they had been raped, by which time some were already 3 to 4 months pregnant.

One medical director reported removing nails which had been inserted into a woman's uterus over 2 months earlier, before she eventually came for medical help and needed to be hospitalized for months. Medical professionals also reported treating women who had been raped anally as well as vaginally, but the survivors found it even more difficult to talk about what had happened to them as this was considered so shameful, so they were offered treatment without discussing the cause of the medical problems they had.

Rape survivors experienced many health problems including bleeding, pain, incontinence, fistulas, and immobility. Some tested positive for HIV/AIDS following rape, while others had unwanted pregnancies due to the lack of access to a safe abortion. Depression, insomnia, anxiety was common among survivors and family members who had witnessed abuse. Most survivors interviewed had not received psychosocial counselling but in some cases the women themselves had not sought help from the fear of stigmatization. The destruction of medical care facilities meant emergency post-rape care such as emergency contraception and safe abortion were not available.

Women and girls in forgotten wars suffer in silence but deserve greater visibility, support and peace. Conflicts and wars hinder the development of human societies, so peaceful solutions are needed.

Women and girls in ongoing wars and conflicts must NOT be forgotten; but listened to, given a voice and the humanitarian aid and other support they need and deserve. Survivors of sexual violence should be supported and not left to hide away in shame. Perpetrators of sexual violence must be brought to justice.

Collectively we can ensure that women and girls in conflicts and wars are not forgotten. We can and must do more to help them.



BEATRIZ BORGES
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE JUSTICE AND PEACE CENTER
(CEPAZ), VENEZUELA

Presented a summary of the report titled “Being a Woman in Venezuela: Community Diagnosis and Proposals for Humanitarian Action” presented by Alianza Con Ellas [1], a coalition of six Venezuelan civil society organizations.

The report is based on information collected through community diagnoses conducted in the field by these organizations in almost 6,500 households across 18 states of Venezuela. The report provides information on the differentiated impact of the ongoing humanitarian emergency in Venezuela on women and girls and proposes measures to mitigate the impact of specific violations detailed in the report.

The report highlights the challenges faced by women in Venezuela in various areas, including health, nutrition, human mobility, violence, and the specific effect on LGBTI people. Some of the key findings of the report include the fact that one in four women in Venezuela never has access to disposable sanitary pads, and three out of five women do not have access to reusable sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and other menstrual hygiene products. The lack of adequate sanitary items and facilities for menstrual hygiene causes women and girls to miss days off school or work and makes them more prone to infections.

The report also notes that inoperative **health services** and lack of resources impede women's access to healthcare for chronic diseases, and 32% of the women surveyed reported having a chronic health condition. The main causes of not receiving necessary medicines for treatment were the cost of medication, with 68% citing it as the reason and prioritizing food expenses over health expenses.

[1] Alianza Con Ellas, formed by the following organizations Accion Solidaria, Centro de Justicia y Paz (Cepaz), Funcamama, Prepara Familia, Uniandes and Union Afirmativa

The report highlights the **issue of food insecurity** in Venezuela, with 8 out of 10 women considering the amount of food they bring to their homes as deficient, scarce, or very scarce. Despite this, 6 out of 10 women reported spending almost the entire family budget on food, and 76% stated that at least one person in their family group is malnourished. Women employ various strategies to acquire food, including buying on credit, borrowing food or money, reducing portion sizes, reducing the number of meals per day, or reducing expenses on health, education, or other items.

The report also sheds light on the **difficulties faced by women in terms of human mobility**, with the main reasons for women's mobility being getting or changing jobs, improving their income, family reunification, and access to medicines and health services. Costs associated with moving or migrating tend to be higher for women due to gender bias. In addition, the report notes that 7% of the women interviewed reported being victims of family violence, with psychological violence being the most prevalent type, followed by physical, symbolic, economic, and sexual violence. Only 31% of the women who reported being victims of violence reported or denounced the incidents, with fear of reprisals and distrust of institutions being the main reasons for not reporting.

Finally, the report highlights the **situation of the LGBTI community** in Venezuela, with 31% of the people who identified themselves as part of the LGBTI community indicating that they have some kind of chronic health condition. Of this group, 39% said that they do not have any type of medical care, and 25% indicated that they do not have medicines for treatment. Almost half (48%) of the LGBT people surveyed reported that they face discrimination in their daily lives, with 20% reporting having suffered physical violence.

The report presents several proposals to mitigate the impact of the specific violations detailed in the report. These proposals are aimed at addressing the differentiated impact of the complex humanitarian emergency on women and girls in Venezuela.

One of the proposals is to improve access to health services and medications for women, especially those with chronic health conditions. This can be achieved by increasing the availability of medicines and improving the quality of health services, as well as by reducing the cost of medications.

Another proposal is to prioritize the provision of menstrual hygiene products to adolescent girls and women, as well as to improve access to sanitation facilities. This will help to reduce the number of missed school or work days and lower the risk of infections.

The report also proposes the establishment of support networks for women victims of gender-based violence, as well as the provision of information about existing support networks. This can be achieved by increasing the visibility and accessibility of social organizations that provide support to female victims of violence.

The report calls for greater attention to the needs of the LGBTI community, including the provision of medical care and medications for those with chronic health conditions. The report also recommends improving access to education and employment opportunities for LGBTI individuals, as well as taking steps to reduce discrimination and violence against them.

Overall, the proposals put forward in the report aim to address the differential impact of the complex humanitarian emergency on women and girls in Venezuela, and to promote gender equality and the realization of women's rights.



JULIE WARD

FORMER MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT

Presented the image of Ferida Osmanovic, a young Balkans woman whose photograph 'A woman in a white dress and red cardigan hanging from a tree in a forest' was published on front pages across the world after the fall of Srebrenica in 1995, prompting questions about the war in Bosnia Herzegovina and illustrating the horrors of war there.

Julie Ward raises questions about the victim's identity, where she was from, what humiliations and deprivations she suffered, and whether she had been raped or witnessed loved ones being killed. She also points out that women and girls are often the forgotten victims of wars and that their trauma is generational.

Julie Ward goes on to mention that the violence began in small ways, such as an abducted child, a throat slit, or a house burnt down, even when the international community had established a so-called safe zone with Dutch peacekeepers. She describes how several individuals were so terrified that they committed suicide by hanging themselves, and those who witnessed the atrocities became silent.

She further explains that after the war, women who survived these terrible violations often continued to reside in the same towns and villages, living side by side with Serbian collaborators and suffering terrible stigma, and some had babies as a result of being raped. The statement also reveals that the forcible transfer and abuse of between 25,000 and 30,000 Bosniak Muslim women, children, and elderly which accompanied the massacre was found to constitute genocide, but the situation of women is not what people think about when they discuss the war.

Julie Ward explains that in Kosovo a few years later, at least 20,000 women were victims of sexual violence as a result of war. However, the word 'victim' is itself problematic. She mentions that the Kosovan activists had to battle innate sexism and misogyny that has its roots in the kanun, a centuries-old moral code and set of laws that gave all power and rights to men whilst reducing women to "sacks for carrying" children.

She highlights that women's activists and international aid organisations have secured gender quotas in the public sector and politics in Kosovo. In 2011, the male-dominated parliament selected Atifete Jahjaga, a 36-year-old police general lieutenant colonel, as Kosovo's first female president, a position she held until 2016. Jahjaga used her platform to help the activists push the parliament to compensate wartime rape survivors.

Julie emphasizes that there can be no peace without justice, and to date, few perpetrators have been prosecuted on charges of wartime sexual violence. She mentions that the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia convicted three top Serbian officials in 2009 for crimes that included "sexual assaults as a form of persecution."

However, in Kosovo, three prosecutions for rape resulted in acquittal after appeal. She concludes by stating that when women are too ashamed to claim compensation, the violations and their suffering become invisible.

A FINAL THANK YOU

I would like to thank the audience and our esteemed panelists who clearly highlighted the grave injustices and challenges that women and girls face in ongoing and past wars and conflicts. The disparity in reporting by the international media has contributed to the erasure of their plight from our collective memory. We must work together to ensure that women and girls are not forgotten and bring greater visibility to their suffering, so that we can mobilize the necessary resources to support and uplift them.

The women and girls in Syria, Venezuela, Ethiopia, and countless other countries in ongoing wars are in dire need of our attention and support. We must lift sanctions and increase regular reporting in the international media to help mobilize funds, humanitarian aid, and other support they so desperately need and deserve. Rape survivors need access to justice, accountability and redress and affected individuals, families, and communities must be able to move forward and rebuild their lives.

Above all, we must work to end wars, for there can be no winners, only losers. We stand in solidarity with the courageous and heroic women who fight daily in unbearable conditions just to survive, while working tirelessly to care and provide for their families.

Once again, I extend my sincere thanks to our speakers and audience. I owe special thanks to **Sarah Patnode** for Zoom support, **Lois Herman** for expertly moderating the panel and for co-hosting the event with us, and **Walaa Allahham** for her insightful presentation as well as help in designing and producing this report.

Mohinder Watson, PhD MPH
Founder, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage

April 2023 Geneva, Switzerland.

BIOS

DR. ANDREA BARSCHDORF-HAGER

CHIEF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CARE AUSTRIA

She has more than 30 years of experience in the humanitarian field as a respected leader in development cooperation work, recognized widely for her insight, commitment, and expertise. As Chief Executive Director of CARE Austria, Dr. Barschdorf-Hager oversees more than 60 projects in 20 countries.

CARE Austria collaborates with the other national CARE organizations that make up CARE International, a global humanitarian network that fights poverty and provides lifesaving assistance in emergencies. CARE Austria works with many of the world's most vulnerable communities to provide opportunities and create futures for the poorest of the poor. In 2022 CARE International reached over 170 million people in more than 100 countries.

Since taking over leadership in November 2009, Dr. Barschdorf-Hager has fostered the sustainable expansion of resources so that CARE Austria now has the most comprehensive international project portfolio of any Austrian NGO. She has led CARE Austria in adopting a middle-term strategy that focuses on women and girls, with the knowledge that poverty can only be overcome when all people have equal rights and opportunities.

WALAA ALLAHHAM

A FORMER HUMANITARIAN WORKER

She is a risk management expert and a humanitarian who is eager to make a positive difference in the lives of others. She has over seven years of extensive experience as a Safety and Security Assistant and Head of Radio Room Units at The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Her commitment to delivering effective solutions in challenging environments has earned her a reputation as a trusted leader in her field. Walaa also spent two years at the United Nations in Geneva providing Finance, HR and other administrative support. Before transitioning to the humanitarian sector, Walaa worked for three years in the private sector as a Sales and Business Development Consultant. Walaa holds a BSc in Economics and has completed advanced studies in humanitarian leadership. Currently, she is pursuing a MSc in Computer Science with Data Analytics at the University of York.

DR MOHINDER WATSON

FOUNDER, ACTION ON CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND PANEL CO-HOST

She is a researcher with a PhD in Health Sciences and a Masters in International Public Health. In 2015, she founded an NGO advocating against child marriage and in 2016 was invited by the Swiss Government to speak at an event to mark the 10th anniversary of the UN Human Rights Council.

She advocates for women's and girls' human rights at the UN in Geneva where she serves as the main representative for the International Council of Women, active in 65 countries. In 2022 she convened the first international expert group meeting to understand the linkages between climate change and child marriage. She regularly speaks on child marriage, violence against women and girls and girls' education.

She has written book chapters on child marriage in the Middle East and conducted research on girls' education in Afghanistan following the takeover by the Taliban in 2021. She has also helped to raise awareness of the heightened risk of a nuclear accident in Ukraine and advocated for the International Atomic Energy Agency experts to have unfettered access to the nuclear plants in Ukraine to ensure their safety.

JULIE WARD

FORMER MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Julie Ward was a Member of the European Parliament from 2014 to 2020 and during that time served on the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee. She was Vice Chair and Gender Mainstreaming Co-ordinator for the Culture and Education Committee and also had responsibility for 'Relations with Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo'.

She represented the Socialists and Democrats at UNCSW on two occasions and gained a reputation for being a strong defender of human rights including women's rights, children's rights, LGBT rights and disability rights.

Since leaving parliament she has worked for various organisations including City of Sanctuary, the UK's network aimed at welcoming refugees. She is a board member of Remembering Srebrenica (UK) and White Ribbon Ukraine.

BEATRIZ BORGES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE JUSTICE AND PEACE CENTER (CEPAZ), VENEZUELA

She is a lawyer, academic and human rights defender from Venezuela. Since 2014 is the Executive Director of The Justice and Peace Center (CEPAZ), a non-profit organization that works to promote and defend democratic values, human rights, and a culture of peace. She is an associate professor and researcher at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello and collaborates with other universities in Venezuela and internationally.

Beatriz is an active public speaker and has spoken at the United Nations and The Inter American System to denounce human rights violations and demand respect for international norms and standards. She works tirelessly to increase awareness of the situation in Venezuela among decision-making at the International level to improve the international response to the crisis.

She has a Masters in Political Action and Citizen Participation from Universidad Rey Juan Carlos y Francisco Vitoria in Spain, a Major Degree in Human Rights, from Andina University in Ecuador and a Professional Certificate in US Law and Methodologies from New York University. Her main focus on advocacy and research are the International Human Rights System, gender equality, human mobility, political participation and human rights, peace and democracy.

LOIS A. HERMAN

FOUNDER & MANAGING DIRECTOR OF WUNRN, THE WOMEN'S UN REPORT NETWORK

WUNRN, based on a UN Study, addresses the human rights, oppression, and empowerment of women and girls all over the globe. The WUNRN ListServe, considered one of the most expansive and active Gender ListServe's in the world, goes throughout the UN System, and to Governments, Embassies & Missions, Academia, NGO's, Religions, Associations, Foundations, Media, Private Sector, Civil Society, and more. Lois A. Herman is a Researcher and Gender Specialist, and has an extensive professional history in corporate management, including international. In the past 2 years, WUNRN has organized over 25 UN Panels on issues of women and girls – Geneva (UN Human Rights Council), NYC (UN CSW & General Assembly) & Rome (UN FAO). Lois A. Herman has received the Spirit of the UN Award.