

# [***Hillary Clinton and Sheryl Sandberg decry sexual violence as a war tactic***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B96-SMY1-JBSS-S05T-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

February 9, 2024 Friday 8:41 PM GMT

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**Length:** 706 words

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**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

New York (CNN) &#8212; Hillary Clinton, Sheryl Sandberg and a coalition of scholars, government officials and legal experts discussed Friday how to prevent sexual violence as a weapon of war.

"We have seen an epidemic, an alarming epidemic of gender-based violence as a weapon of war," Clinton said during her opening remarks at the event in New York hosted by Columbia University's Institute of Global ***Politics*** and the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. Clinton, the former Secretary of State in the Obama administration, is a member of Columbia's faculty.

"This should be viewed as the global problem that it is, but sadly it is nothing new," Clinton added, noting this issue re-emerged during recent conflicts in Sudan, Darfur, Ukraine, and in Israel on Hamas' October 7 attack.

Israeli authorities have accused Hamas militants of [*committing widespread, systemic sexual violence*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/06/middleeast/rape-sexual-violence-hamas-israel-what-we-know-intl/index.html) as part of their attack. Despite mounting evidence from Israeli investigators and eyewitness sources, Hamas has repeatedly denied allegations that its fighters committed sexual violence during the attack.

Sandberg, the former chief operating officer of Facebook and founder of the nonprofit group Lean In, interviewed women who have been working on addressing this issue in Ukraine and Africa, emphasizing that it is important to learn from past conflicts where these atrocities have occurred in order to prevent these same horrors from taking place in the future.

"Each conflict sets the precedent for the next," Sandberg said. "How we handle each one matters for what happens in the future."

Sandberg has been raising awareness to the reports of widespread sexual violence on October 7, and [*previously spoke out alongside Clinton*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/04/tech/sheryl-sandberg-un-israel-hamas/index.html) at a UN event last December in New York that broadcast witness testimony and other evidence of rape being used as a tool of war during the attacks.

"I feel so strongly that no matter the ***politics*** of a situation, rape can never be overlooked, because that would set such a dangerous precedent for people all over the world," Sandberg said Friday.

Sandberg interviewed Oleksandra Matviichuk, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning lawyer who has been documenting Russia's war crimes against civilians. Matviichuk said sexual violence during the war in Ukraine is violence that "is directed to the whole Ukrainian society."

"The survivors of sexual violence feel shame because it happens with them," Matviichuk said. "Their relatives, families, neighbors feel guilt because they can't stop this. And the other members of communities, they they feel fear, because they can be treated in the same way."

Some speakers called for new approaches to academic research. Others identified policies or collaborations that could help. Clinton ultimately called for more support from the UN and other international players in holding accountable perpetrators of this type of violence.

"Accountability is critical in preventing gender violence," Clinton said. "It's particularly important when the violence is committed by people in positions of authority, including the military or the police force."

"Part of the reason these crimes are so rampant is because they are perpetrated with impunity," Clinton added.

Finally, Clinton implored that the conference on Friday was not merely about "the symbolism of women in leadership roles" with her and Sandberg as headliners.

"It is about understanding deeply, the very real ways that women and girls are impacted differently by global challenges including this challenge of conflict-related sexual violence," Clinton said.

Clinton's remarks at Columbia University - and remarks by some other speakers - were briefly interrupted by protesters chanting "Free Palestine." Linda Thomas-Greenfield, former US Ambassador to the UN seemingly addressed these protestors at one point, recognizing "there are a lot of emotions about all of these issues."

"Please be assured that there is no issue that's related to sexual violence, violence anywhere in the world that we're not concerned about and we're not working on every single day," Thomas-Greenfield said.

By Catherine Thorbecke, CNN

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**Load-Date:** February 12, 2024

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