

as the result of conflict. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of the world's refugees has increased from 17 million in 1991 to 27 million in 1995. As of 1995 there were also approximately 5.4 million internally displaced peoples. Refugee life for most is extremely traumatic;

To become a refugee is to experience a deep sense of loss. When people go into exile, they are frequently obliged to abandon many of the assets which they had accumulated in their homeland, however meagre those might have been. Becoming a refugee normally entails a lowering of one's social and economic status. Even in countries with generous asylum policies, refugees are almost inevitably obliged to settle on the most marginal land and to accept the least desirable and worst paid jobs.

The loss experience by a refugee also has important social, psychological and legal dimensions. When people are forced into exile, they are separated from a familiar environment and cut off from friends, family and established social networks. Not knowing when they will be able to return to their homes, or what they will find when they get there, many refugees live in a perpetual state of uncertainty. And while some refugees are able to settle down and integrate in another society, many find that they are obliged to live as second-class residents in their country of asylum, deprived of rights, freedoms and benefits enjoyed by ordinary citizens of that state (UNHCR,1995:26).

The loss and uncertainty described above is further compounded for women, who compose 80% of all refugees. In their flight from danger as well as upon their arrival in refugee camps, women remain vulnerable to discrimination and violence. According to Sima Wali;

In the camps in countries of first asylum, the priority accorded to male refugees means that the needs of rape victims, widows, and the handicapped are especially ignored because men do not regard them as valuable or because they lack male protection. Women are often malnourished because they receive less food than male refugees. They are last to receive medical attention, and are among the first to starve to death. Rendered voiceless and powerless, refugee and displaced women are expected to defer their needs to the political and religious dictates of the male hierarchy. Unfortunately, Western and international assistance agencies often perpetuate this condition by granting food, relief assistance, and protection to male refugees. Often, they justify such action by claiming it "culturally appropriate." (Wali,1995:337)

What is more, sexual violence is rampant. In the host countries, local residents and gangs, military and immigrant officials, and even the local police often view women as targets of assault (Human Rights Global Report on Women,1995:102). As a result of great changes in the family