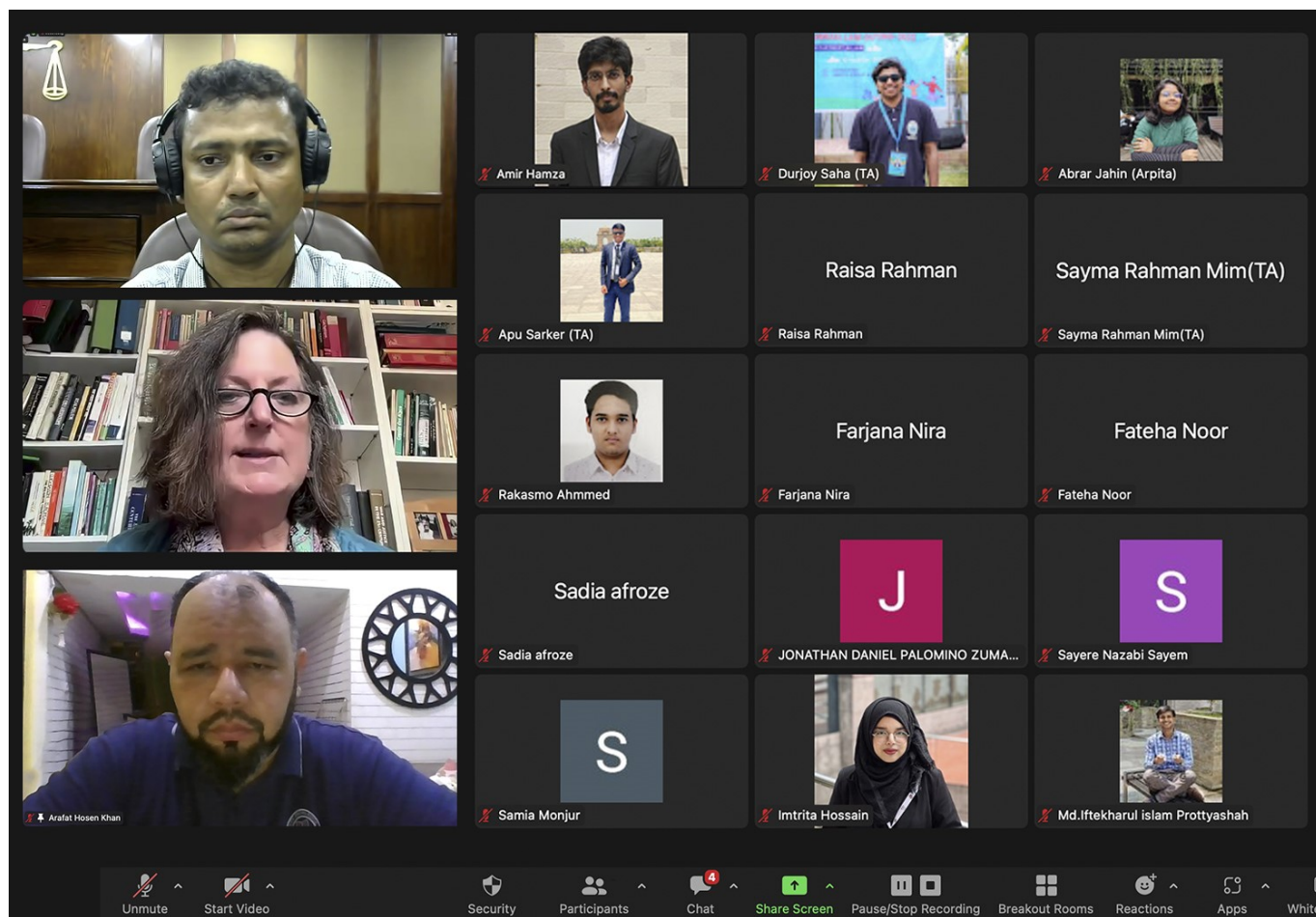


NSU Law Department Hosts Webinar on Sexual Violence Testimony in Conflict Archives



Porikroma Desk : The Department of Law at North South University (NSU) organized a webinar titled 'Hints of Sexual Violence: What the Akayesu Trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda Can Teach Us About Uncovering Sexual Violence Testimony in Conflict Archives' on 27 May 2024.

Barrister Arafat Hosen Khan, Chair, Department of Law, North South University, gave the introductory remarks. Professor Rosemary Byrne, Professor of Legal Studies, at New York University Abu Dhabi, was the guest speaker in the webinar.

In the webinar, Professor Byrne discussed the testimony of sexual violence in conflicts that historically occupy a liminal space in archives. She pointed out that before the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR) in the 1990s, sexual violence in armed conflict (SVAC) received scant attention in legal and academic records. The ICTR archives, containing vast amounts of evidence and testimony, show that SVAC was often underrepresented due to limited resources and expertise in investigations.

She also discussed the 'hints' of SVAC in the Akayesu trial, focusing on testimony and the linguistic and cultural context of the witness accounts. It traced how initial peripheral mentions of sexual violence in the trial evolved into a comprehensive record of systematic SVAC in the Taba commune during the Rwandan genocide.

She described the mediating and translating experiences in the trial chamber. Testimonies in the Akayesu trial were predominantly in Kinyarwanda, posing challenges in translation and interpretation. Cultural sensitivities and linguistic nuances complicate the articulation of sexual violence. Witnesses often used euphemisms, which the Trial Chamber had to interpret carefully. Terms like "gusambanya," "kurungora," "kuryamana," and "gufata kungufu" were used to describe rape, reflecting the societal context of the testimony. The trial record highlights the importance of understanding these linguistic subtleties and the broader cultural implications.

Lastly, she concluded that the trial record, which is mostly in conflict archives, may guide researchers, as the hints in the trial record suggest the SVAC testimony was just the tip of the iceberg.

Md. Rizwanul Islam, Professor, Department of Law, North South University, moderated the webinar. This webinar is a part of the international webinar series of the Department of Law,

North South University, which was launched in January 2021.