

PETITION

# Speak out against rape in the Congo!

Congolese Women's Campaign Against Sexual Violence in the DRC

Tuesday 4 March 2008, by [Against the Current](#) (Date first published: February 2008).

WHICH CURRENT WAR has taken more lives than the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Darfur put together?

It's the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a brutal conflict whose elements include the "dirty diamond" trade and other minerals — including gold, copper, tin and cobalt — as well as spillovers from the 1990s genocide in Rwanda, and the ruinous legacy of the decades-long western-backed Mobutu dictatorship. It is estimated that over the last decade there have been four million deaths.

As frequently occurs in wars anywhere in the world, noncombatants including women and children suffer the greatest death and mutilation. A report by Anderson Cooper of CNN and a CBS "60 Minutes" team found:

*"Fighting has broken out once again in Eastern Congo and the region threatens to slip into all-out war. Each new battle is followed by pillaging and rape; entire communities are terrorized. Forced to flee their homes, people take whatever they can, and walk for miles in the desperate hope of finding food and shelter. Over the past year, more than 500,000 people have been uprooted. A fraction of them make it to cramped camps, where they depend on UN aid to survive."* (CBS News, January 13, 2008)

In this climate, over the past decade "hundreds of thousands have been raped, many of them gang-raped...In some villages as many as 90 percent of the women have been raped," according to the same report.

Anneka Von Woudenburg, senior Congo researcher for Human Rights Watch, stated that rape is a method of terror: "This is not rape because soldiers have got bored and have nothing to do. It is a way to ensure that communities accept the power and authority of that particular armed group. This is about terror. This is about using it as a weapon of war."

Von Woudenberg described the justice system in the Congo as "on its knees" and pointed out "I can count on one hand the number of cases that we're aware of that have been brought to trial. Literally here people get away with rape, they get away with murder. The chances of being arrested are nil." Judith Registre of Women for Women explains: "When a woman is raped, it's not just her...It's the entire community that's destroyed. When they take a woman to rape her, they'll line up other members of the communities to actually witness that. They make them watch. And so what that means for that particular woman when it's all over, is that total shame, personally, to have been witnessed by so many people as she's being violated."

Those who are forced to watch the rape are often filled with humiliation at their being unable to prevent the sexual assault; for the women and children who are raped and often mutilated, they have to face the possibility of pregnancy, and rejection by their men.

Only a fraction of those who have been attacked, raped and forced to flee make it to a UN refugee camp, but there is no adequate protection for women even in the overcrowded refugee camps. Rape is no longer the exception, but the norm.

Dr. Denis Mukwege, director of Panzi Hospital in Eastern Congo, performs five surgeries a day for women who have suffered not only rape but mutilation by broken bottles or bayonets inserted in their vaginas. Many are shunned because of fears they have contracted HIV, or are incontinent because of the violence of the rapes.

War is hell for everyone. For women, it's a holocaust.

\* From <http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/1382>

To sign the international petition supporting the Congolese Women's Campaign Against Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, go to <http://drcsexualviolence.org/site/e...>

And see below:

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## **Congolese Women's Campaign Against Sexual Violence in the DRC**

### **PETITION FOR THE CONGOLESE WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE DRC INTENDED FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

***Every day, 40 women are raped in the Eastern Congo. It's well known reality that has been documented and reported by media, NGOs, international institutions and States. But nothing changes, sexual violence is still widespread. So what more can be done?***

In the face of sexual violence committed during the conflict, women, local women's associations and civil society have launched an urgent appeal ("SOS Femmes en Danger"). These unspeakable crimes have destroyed lives and paralyzed local communities for years to come.

- No to impunity! Yes to effective reparation! These are the slogans of the activists spearheading the campaigns against sexual violence.

But while people were dancing in the cities on the day the National Campaign Against Sexual Violence was launched, women were still being raped with impunity in our villages. We need more than legislation to eradicate these crimes. Political will is needed to ensure that the Law Against Sexual Violence is effectively applied and to end the inertia of the legal system. An education campaign is also needed to mobilize society as well as a complete accompaniment programme for victims and their families.

The victims are full-fledged citizens and are vital to the transformation of Congolese society. Their voices must be heard, their needs fulfilled and their dignity restored. They must not be used as instruments to obtain funds, or as data to illustrate their hardship for the benefit of international organizations, so far from their daily reality.

This disconnect from reality is all too familiar to us as members of local women's NGOs. We have been on the ground before, during and after the conflict. We are not just passing through, we are

here to stay. At the moment, we are deeply concerned about our ability to sustain our activities in relationship based on dependency: we are not informed of international initiatives and are excluded from discussions with funding agencies. We feel disconnected, mistreated and scorned. What will happen when the international NGOs and UN agencies leave? We are much more than mere beneficiaries, we are unwavering spokeswomen committed to rebuilding the future of our country as stipulated in Security Council Resolution 1325.

Our message is intended for international NGOs, funding agencies and UN agencies: let's work together! But let's work together productively!

Recognize our expertise!

Recognize our experience!

Respect our work!

Get involved in all aspects of your interventions among victims, from fundraising to setting up campaigns and taking action on the ground!

What is the point of duplicating initiatives? What is the point of giving victims what they have not asked for? How can you claim to change the reality of victims when you do not speak their language and do not know their abilities and aspirations?

Everyday, we work with victims and their loved ones; we are the sister, the mother, the aunt, the grandmother, the neighbour. We know how to listen, we know how to give them a voice, we know how to mobilize the community and we understand the importance of forging ties with customary powers: give us sustainable tools to strengthen their own lives, their families, their communities and their society. Strengthening the autonomy of local NGOs will strengthen the autonomy of victims.

Without your support, our action will lose momentum. Without our partnership, your action will have little impact. Help us change the direction of the fight against sexual violence in the DRC.

This petition was signed by the following organizations:

Arche d'Alliance (ARAL) (Sud-Kivu)

Association des Femmes pour les Droits et la Démocratie (AFD) (Sud-Kivu)

Association des Femmes pour le Progrès Social et Culturel (AFPSC) (Est de la RDC)

Association des Mamans Chrétiennes pour l'Assistance aux Vulnérables (AMCAV) (Sud-Kivu)

Association pour la Défense des Droits des Femmes (Nord-Kivu)

Collectif des Associations Féminines de Beni (CAF/Beni) (Nord-Kivu)

ESSAIM (Cadre de concertation et d'action pour la défense des droits des femmes) (Est de la RDC)

Forum des Mamans de l'Ituri (FOMI) (Ituri)

Initiative des Femmes pour le Développement et l'Autopromotion (IFDA) (Sud-Kivu)

Réseau Femmes Développement / Ituri (Province Orientale)

Solidarité des Femmes Activistes des Droits Humains (SOFAD) (Sud-Kivu)

Solidarité des Femmes en Difficultés (SOFED) (Sud-Kivu)

Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI) (Nord-Kivu, Ituri)

Solidarité et Paix pour le Développement Intégré (SOPADI) (Sud-Kivu)

Syndicat des Femmes Défavorisées (SYFED) (Sud-Kivu)

Synergie des Femmes contre les Violences Sexuelles (SFVS) (Nord-Kivu)

**With support from:**

Coalition for the Rights of Women in Conflict Situations (Canada)

Rights & Democracy (Canada)

\* From: <http://drcsexualviolence.org/site/en/node/58>