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DRC: Help the healing begin

Armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have raped tens of thousands of women, in systematic attacks marked by extreme brutality.

The survivors of rape have long-term and sometimes fatal injuries and illnesses. Most women who have been raped suffer nightmares and flashbacks. Abandonment by husbands and discrimination by communities, because of the stigma attached to rape, leave them displaced, destitute and isolated.

After years of warfare, the health care system in the east is in ruins. Yet despite peace agreements and an improving security situation in many areas, no coordinated effort has been made to begin the rehabilitation of hospitals and health centres. Local women's and human rights organizations have responded with compassionate and positive initiatives, but are wholly unsupported by the government.

The lack of any comprehensive national and international response means that many thousands of rape survivors are receiving no assistance at all. Many continue to die needlessly because of this indifference. The DRC government and international community must act quickly to establish decent health care programmes for survivors of rape and other human rights abuses.

Write to the DRC government urging them to act as soon as possible. You can also write to your own government asking them to help the DRC government meet the needs of survivors of rape.

Dear President

I am writing to express my concern about the desperate medical and humanitarian situation of tens of thousands of rape survivors in eastern DRC.

Many of these survivors are suffering serious and life-threatening illnesses and injuries. All are traumatised. A large number are ostracized by their families and communities, with little or no means of supporting themselves economically. None has received justice or redress for the crimes they have suffered.

All governments have a duty to prevent and punish sexual violence, and to provide the victims with redress. The armed groups, which are responsible for repeated violations of international humanitarian law, must also assume their responsibility for acts of sexual violence.

I urge your government, in cooperation with the international community, to take immediate steps to provide survivors of rape and other human rights abuses with the medical treatment and other care they need. In particular, I call on you to:

- plan and implement a comprehensive programme of emergency medical and psychological care for rape survivors in eastern DRC;
- make reconstruction of the national health care system a priority for national spending, with a particular focus on the destroyed health infrastructure of the east;

- encourage, support and protect Congolese women's and human rights activists in their efforts to provide support to rape survivors and to end their social and economic exclusion;
- take greater action to ensure that those responsible for such attacks are prevented from carrying out further abuses and are brought to justice.

Yours sincerely,

H.E. President Joseph Kabila
Bureau du Président
Av. de Lemera
Kinshasa Gombe
République Démocratique du Congo

And your own government's Minister of Foreign Affairs or International Development



The kitchen of a major general hospital, South-Kivu province. After years of warfare, the health care system in the east is in ruins.

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