

## Stop violence against women

### Democratic Republic of the Congo – the struggle for health care and justice for rape survivors

[Quote]

*" My dad told me to hide. When the soldiers came in they shot my mum and my dad before my eyes. I stayed hidden but the soldiers found me and raped me... they were many. "*

Aurélie (not her real name) was 10 years old when her village was attacked by an armed group in 2002. She still suffers intense pains and long periods of depression.

*" I really would like to go back to school, but the other kids insult me, calling me the enemy's woman. "*

[End quote]

Armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have raped tens of thousands of women, in attacks marked by extreme brutality. Sometimes they kill fathers, husbands and sons before raping the girls and women. They have shot and knifed women and mutilated them with sharpened sticks, before robbing them of all their possessions.

Women have been raped in front of their children and relatives, or publicly raped in a group to punish a whole community suspected of supporting a rival armed group. Armed groups have abducted women as sexual slaves, and held them in inhuman conditions, often naked and dirty, for weeks or months on end.

The survivors of rape have long-term and sometimes fatal injuries. Many require reconstructive surgery, or have to endure severe pains and bleeding, incontinence, HIV/AIDS and other infections. Pregnancy, especially for the very young, can be life threatening. 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 destitute and isolated.

The chances of treatment for the injuries of rape victims are negligible. State health facilities across the east are largely destroyed, or operate with minimal resources. Women walk for days to reach help but thousands have access to traditional herbal treatments only. No more than two small hospitals, in an area roughly the size of France and Spain combined, have the resources for reconstructive surgery. There is a single experimental HIV treatment programme, and there are only a few clinics that treat sexually transmitted infections.

[Quote]

Panzi Hospital in Bukavu treats up to 200 rape survivors a month, and has treated more than 1,500 since 1999. *"In the beginning the women were frightened of admitting they'd been raped,"* the only surgeon carrying out reconstructive surgery on rape victims told Amnesty International. *"Now they are determined to speak out."*

[End quote]

Rape survivors have little prospect of judicial redress. The crimes of sexual violence against them constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, yet virtually none of those responsible has been brought to justice.

Local women's and human rights organizations have responded with compassionate and positive initiatives, but are wholly unsupported by the government and only rarely by the international community. Grassroots networks of women activists provide basic counselling for survivors, medical and legal assistance, and economic support, often in the form of self-help micro-credit projects. Survivors themselves are determined to challenge government inaction and the social stigma attached to rape. Where they lead by example, the DRC government and international community must follow.

[Photo captions]

Cover photo : Congolese refugees in Ntoroko, Uganda, July 2003. They were widowed in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. © AI

Left : Aurélie © AI

[End captions]

[Box]

## **Support our campaign: together we can make a difference**

- ***Take an interest:***

**Find out and monitor how your community, government, police, security forces and courts respond to violence against women and girls.**

- ***Take a stand:***

**Speak out about violence against women. Challenge prejudiced or dismissive attitudes.**

- ***Take action:***

**Join our global campaign for women's right to freedom from violence and discrimination.**

[End box]

[Box]

In the home and in the community, in times of war and peace, millions of women and girls are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed with impunity. Join Amnesty International's campaign to demand action by governments, communities and individuals to stop violence against women throughout the world.

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## **Together we can make our voices heard**

Join us in calling on the DRC transitional government and on the international

community to give priority to ensuring that appropriate health care is available to survivors of sexual violence in the DRC.

**Urge your own government's Minister for International Development (or similar) to:**

- help create and contribute to an emergency medical programme for rape survivors in eastern DRC, to include mobile multi-disciplinary health teams
- help create and contribute to an expert mission to assess the priority needs of the DRC's health care system as the basis of a joint reconstruction plan with international donor assistance

**Urge the DRC government (which includes representatives of most armed groups) to:**

- issue clear instructions to all armed forces to stop all forms of sexual violence and to suspend from duty anyone implicated in such attacks
- end impunity for rapists and other perpetrators of violence against women, by investigating all reported incidents promptly and impartially and by bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international human rights standards, and enable survivors of sexual violence to obtain full redress
- organize, in partnership with international donors, an emergency medical programme for rape survivors in eastern DRC and an expert mission to assess the priority needs of the DRC's health care system

Send your appeals to: Son Excellence Général Major Joseph Kabila, Président de la République, Présidence de la République, Palais de la Nation, Kinshasa Ngaliema, République Démocratique du Congo

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**What you can do**

- Join Amnesty International and become part of a worldwide movement campaigning for an end to human rights violations. Help us to make a difference.
- Take action on Amnesty International's website at [web.amnesty.org/actforwomen/actnow-index-eng](http://web.amnesty.org/actforwomen/actnow-index-eng)
- Make a donation to support Amnesty International's work.

Want to know more?

Contact the Amnesty International office in your country at the address in the box (right), if there is one.

Or contact

Amnesty International's International Secretariat in London:

Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

Or visit Amnesty International's website at [www.amnesty.org/actforwomen](http://www.amnesty.org/actforwomen)

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