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STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

No justice for rape victim

Bitondo Nyumba

Justice has yet to be served in the case of Bitondo Nyumba, a 56-year-old woman who died as a result of injuries she suffered when she was attacked and raped by government soldiers in May 2005. But with a new government recently taking office in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), now is the time to renew calls for justice.

Bitondo Nyumba, a widow and mother of four, was beaten and raped on 11 May 2005 in her home in the village of Katungulu, South-Kivu province, by government soldiers.

The attack caused life-threatening injuries. After an operation in the state hospital at Nundu, doctors reportedly suspended treatment because Bitondo Nyumba's family could not afford to pay. Local human rights activists then arranged for her to be taken to the general hospital in Uvira, and paid for her second operation.

When her condition became more stable, Bitondo Nyumba was transferred to Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, South-Kivu province. Subsidized by international humanitarian funds, the hospital provides free medical treatment and reconstructive surgery. However, on 21 June 2005 Bitondo Nyumba died, due to an infection reportedly caused by a failure to properly treat her injuries earlier.

Two soldiers were arrested in August 2005 in connection with the rape, but were released after a few weeks without explanation. Bitondo Nyumba's family filed a legal complaint and were subsequently threatened by soldiers from the same brigade as the alleged perpetrators. The family was forced to move to another village. The threats reportedly included statements such as: "You are the ones who accused us. Keep your mouths shut."



Dear President

I am writing to urge you and your new government to end impunity for rapes committed by the DRC armed forces and police. In particular, I wish to express concern about the case of Bitondo Nyumba, who was raped on 11 May 2005 by government soldiers. To date, no one has been brought to justice and her family has been threatened and intimidated. I urge you to demonstrate your commitment to protecting human rights by:

- ▶ Conducting a prompt, independent and thorough judicial investigation into the rape and subsequent death of Bitondo Nyumba, and bringing the perpetrators to justice.
- ▶ Protecting Bitondo Nyumba's family and witnesses from further threats or reprisals.
- ▶ Ensuring immediate access to adequate and appropriate health services for women and girls who are survivors of rape.

Yours sincerely

Name _____ Country _____



Democratic Republic of Congo – War on women

Tens of thousands of women and girls have been raped by combatant forces since the conflict in the DRC began in August 1998. The fighting and its aftermath of poverty, disease and malnutrition have claimed an estimated four million lives. Despite a well-established peace process, high levels of insecurity and human rights abuses continue in the east of the country. Several armed factions appear to favour a continuation of violence as a means of achieving their political and economic objectives.

Rape has been used deliberately and strategically to attack the fundamental values of the community, to terrorize and humiliate those suspected of supporting an enemy group and to impose the supremacy of one group over another. Most rape survivors are denied the medical care they need. The health

care infrastructure in the DRC is severely under-resourced and in many areas is unable to provide even the most basic treatment.

Across the DRC there is a lack of trained doctors, including gynaecologists and obstetricians.

Many rape survivors wish to pursue legal action against the perpetrators, but a weakened judicial system prevents justice or redress, and continuing insecurity means women live in fear of reprisals if they do speak out. Few perpetrators have been brought to justice and no senior officer has been prosecuted or disciplined for a rape committed by either himself or one of the officers under his command.

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