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**COMMISSION DU DEVELOPPEMENT  
COMMISSION DES DROITS DE LA FEMME ET EGALITE DES GENRES**

**Audition publique : Les femmes et la guerre**

**6 mai 2008, 15.30-18.30 Parlement Européen, Bruxelles, Salle: ASP 3G2**

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**A community of zero tolerance towards sexual  
violence**

You have called me here to give testimony. I testify to what I have seen and heard, sadly, to what I see and hear each day of my life in Goma. In our hospital, we are surrounded by the women who have suffered most grievously from the effects of this war, that has dragged on year after year – sixteen years now. In all these conflicts, the women pay the highest price.

I am not an expert in politics, in macro-economics, in military security policy. I am an expert in mending broken bodies. I work with a team of compassionate carers who are experts in mending broken hearts. Here, you are experts in the big picture. To me, you seem to be the cosmic chess players, and the women of Masisi and Miriki are the pawns, pushed around from one square to another, expendable pieces in someone's hidden strategy.

So what evidence can I bring to this discussion? There is the evidence of statistics, and here are a few:

We have worked since 2002 to assist survivors of rape. We began in response to the plight of one woman, Furaha, torn apart by gang rape, tortured with a stick, and left for weeks to rot in a rural hospital, where every item that could have helped her had been looted by marauding militia. On that day in August 2002, we had no idea that she would be the first of over 16000 women in North Kivu and Maniema provinces who have found comfort and treatment through HEAL Africa. And remember that HEAL Africa is just one of dozens of organisations working in the East of my country to assist such women.

We can bring them medical care – first aid and post exposure prophylaxis against HIV and sexually transmitted diseases.

We can bring them friendship, comfort, psychosocial counseling, family mediation.

We can give them surgical repair of the tears and holes and leaks and ulcers caused by rape.

We can give them training, literacy, and income generating grants to rebuild their family revenues.

But can we bring them peace?

Without peace, there will be no end to the rapes.

Do you want proof? In Maniema province, we have assisted over 6000 women raped during the wars. In the past 3 years, there has been no armed conflict in Maniema. In the first four months of this year, there were 10 new cases of rape reported in the six health zones where we work.

Compare this with North Kivu. In North Kivu, where there has been no end to the wars to this day, for the same period, in just two health zones, there have been over 1200 new cases of rape.

74% of the authors of these rapes are members of the regular army or a militia. 26% are civilians.

26% of 1200! This is appalling! What can we do to bring the community back to its senses? These brutal criminals are the neighbours, the family members, the teachers, the lawless dregs of a society that has lost its bearings. Just look at the figures and the ages of the women treated at our hospital in Goma, who also brought a complaint to court over the past 12 months: (slide)

Unfortunately, the number of judgments pronounced for rape in the Goma courts was only 70 out of 184 cases before the courts. Of these, 37 were acquittals; of the 33 convictions, only 20 criminals are today in prison.

So the task before us is to put an end to the violence and restore women in their rights.

And this is how you and I must share the task. The task is twofold:

- You must work for peace, on the international scene.
- My colleagues and I, we must work for a community of zero-tolerance of sexual violence in our country.

We can help you in your task: we can give you documentary evidence of the rapes in a form that touches the emotions and makes people ask the question: what can I do to help put a stop to such cruelty? We can give you advocacy materials and access to UN Security Council reports that name the names of the people who are profiting from this war.

And you can help us in the huge task of changing the underlying attitudes in our society that condone rape, or reduce it to a misdemeanour that can be compensated by the payment of a chicken or a goat.

What does it take to change the attitudes of a whole society? Firstly, you need a law that condemns rape and all forms of sexual violence unequivocally; and a constitution that

enshrines the parity of men and women; equal in rights before the law; equally sacred in their person before God; equal partners in the development of the country.

As a senator, with my colleagues in the house, I had the privilege of writing those articles into our constitution. Article 15 defines rape used to dislocate communities as a crime against humanity. It was voted by referendum in December 2005; a radical new law on sexual violence was passed in 2006.

Secondly, after the legal framework, you need a justice system that can give the law teeth, and enforce respect for it by dissuasion.

But most importantly, thirdly, you need a community that agrees that the law is a good law, so the people who break it are perceived as the true enemies of our society. In our Gender and Justice programme, HEAL Africa is working at village and community level to persuade people that the law is in their own best interests, that a society where women play an equal role with equal responsibilities and privileges, alongside men, is the society that will progress to meet everyone's needs.

You may think that I, a man, am not the one to stand here and talk about the rights of women. It is true that in Congo, men have exploited and denigrated women, and are still doing so today. But the way forward is not in an opposition between males and females. People say that no group that holds power will give up power willingly. And men effectively hold power over women in Congo: economic power, political and domestic power as well as physical power. Yet the way forward will not be found in a polarizing opposition between male chauvinists and women's libbers.

The new society of Congo will be forged in collaboration between men and women, creating a community where each gender has equal opportunities to develop, to find fulfillment and contribute to a safe and peaceful future. In that community, the turn of this century will be remembered with horror for the barbaric abuse of women that was once tolerated and left unpunished. The women in that future day will be able to walk to the river in the evening to get water; they will work in their fields without fear; and they will tell their children, "It was not always like this. You must protect the safety and freedom that we fought to obtain for you. It is up to you to ensure that we never return to such a state of barbarity as we saw in 2008."

We are asking the people of the European Union to stand beside us and work with us in this mission, which I believe we will achieve in my lifetime – a community of zero-tolerance of sexual violence.

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Here is a suggestion for a lobbying letter to your Member of Parliament:

Dear ....

I have been informed of the horrible violence against women in the ongoing conflict in Eastern DR Congo. I am now aware that there are over 750 000 internally displaced people in the province of North Kivu alone as a result of this conflict.

As a member of the ... electorate, I wish to know:

1. How is ... supporting the peace process in D R Congo? How did ... vote on the mandate of the UN peace keeping mission in DR Congo? What suggestions has the ... government made to strengthen the effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping mission in D R Congo? How much does the ... government contribute to the UN peacekeeping mission in D R Congo?
2. As a concerned ..., I wish to know how much ... is contributing to the World Food Program in D R Congo. WFP has had to cut rations to many essential programs assisting vulnerable children in the province of North Kivu, in order to meet the survival needs of the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the ongoing war in the east. Does ... plan to increase its contribution to the WFP, in the light of this crisis, and by how much?
3. The Humanitarian Agencies working in D R Congo have developed a Humanitarian Assistance Plan for 2008. Donor governments have so far committed funding for only 27% of this budget. What is ...'s contribution to this budget and by how much could it be increased urgently in 2008?
4. Are the Justice Minister and the Foreign Minister aware of the **Security Council Report on the Illegal Exploitation of the Resources of the D R Congo**? Has the ... government taken any action against the companies and individuals named in this report? I would like to suggest: examination of the assets of these companies, a ban on doing business with these companies and their subsidiaries and affiliates, regulation of the source of minerals, gem stones and hard woods illegally exported from eastern DR Congo through neighbouring countries (Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda).

Documentary evidence of the link between the war, the warlords and the mineral exploitation can be viewed on the following link

<http://www.mediastorm.org/0022.htm>

The UN Security Council report on the Illegal Exploitation of the Resources of Congo can be downloaded through the following link

<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/621/79/pdf/N0262179.pdf?OpenElement>

Documentary footage on rape used as a weapon of war, and the impact of sexual violence on young women can be viewed with the film *Lumo* [www.gomafilmproject.org](http://www.gomafilmproject.org)