



## **Stop Rape in The Democratic Republic of Congo**

### The Conflict

Despite the war formally ending with a peace agreement almost a decade ago, the Democratic Republic of Congo continues to be embroiled in a violent and deadly conflict. Having claimed at least 5.4 million lives since the outbreak of war in 1998, the country has also received the unwelcome distinction as the rape capital of the world.

Its strategic importance, as well as bountiful natural resources—raw minerals, land, and fresh water—are a longstanding source of tension within the Congo. The 1994 Rwandan Genocide, which brought an influx of 1.5 million people over the border into North and South Kivu, exacerbated preexisting hostilities in the area. Disputes over citizenship and land ownership only compounded ethnic rivalries and weak governance structures.

Aging Congolese dictator Mobutu Sese Seko had been aggravating inequality among the population, throwing the country into a steep economic decline over time. An uprising born in the eastern provinces, supported by Rwanda and Uganda, seized the fragile moment and moved rapidly on the capital. Yet, new President Laurent Kabila soon gained the wrath of his foreign allies, embroiling the entire region into a continental war in 1998.

While a peace agreement in 2002 was to end to the fighting, violence still characterizes daily life. Especially in North and South Kivu provinces, Congolese rebels and foreign groups remain active and significant military operations by the state have been launched in recent years. In northeastern Province Orientale, there has been renewed fighting with the incursion of the Lord's Resistance Army.

Efforts were made to demobilize and integrate fighters into a new Congolese force or reintegrate them into communities, yet the project has faced a massive challenge. Continuing violence provides an incentive to return to old allegiances, with numerous desertions from the army and program. The attraction of mineral wealth has posed an additional challenge and provided extra income to rebel groups, armed gangs, and major political players alike—further aggravating institutional disorder which provides ideal circumstances for committing widespread human rights violations without punishment.



## The Rape & Gender Violence

Rape and gender violence in The Democratic Republic of Congo has been marked by extreme brutality including rape, gang rape, genital mutilation, sexual slavery, and insertion of objects into cavities.

As the conflict is fought within communities, violence occurs mostly in homes, villages, and in the fields where people work. Communities are often targeted for conspiring with the enemy or are looted after a skirmish. The Congolese security forces have also been known to loot (and commit acts of sexual violence on the civilian population) due to unpaid salaries or during mutinies against officers. All sides in the conflict have committed systematic rape and gender violence including the foreign-backed groups, local rebels, community-based militia—the *Mai Mai*, as well as the Congolese state forces.

Reasons for rape by armed men, whether belonging to the government army, rebel group or foreign-backed group, are varied. These include systematic humiliation to counter men's growing frustration at deteriorating status in society, to breed insecurity and fear in communities, and *Mai Mai* members have additionally stated that rape provides "magical powers" before combat.

The incidence of rape remains highest in areas where military operations take place, yet there has been a sharp rise in gender violence throughout the whole of the country. The severe gender imbalance, with prevailing impunity, has allowed for a society where rape is acceptable and unpunished. Domestic violence, rape by former troops living within communities, and by men in positions of power—including police officers—is common. Survivors still lack comprehensive support, and are often too ashamed and fearful to come forward.

Data to document the prevalence of male rape is being gathered, yet male survivors are still often silent, with little access to medical or psychosocial support. Testimonies point to an increase of systematic male rape with military operations in 2009—the last push by Congo to remove foreign forces from the Kivu region.

Impunity reigns within the Democratic Republic of Congo, and despite the government's acknowledgement that its own security forces constitute one of the main groups of perpetrators, comprehensive reforms to the security sector have not been enacted. Known perpetrators of mass human rights violations remain within the army and major hurdles remain to provide the Congolese with a security force that is a protector rather than an instigator of gender violence.



## The Research

“We are always send by our chiefs who tells us “Do this!” Despite your refusal they oblige you to do it; otherwise you will be beaten seriously. As a result, you will do it unwittingly. And you can even rape because of that.”

*Rape in War: Motives of Militia in DRC, Jocelyn Kelly, June 2010 (United States Institute of Peace)*

<http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR243Kelly.pdf>

More than 400,000 women ages 15 to 49 experienced rape between 2006 and 2007 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. That is equivalent to 1,152 women raped every day, 48 women raped every hour, or four women raped every five minutes.

*If Numbers Could Scream: Estimates and Determinants of Sexual Violence in the Republic of the Congo, Amber Peterman, Tia Palermo, Caryn Bredenkamp, June 2011 (American Public Health Association)*

<http://stonybrookmedicine.edu/newsroom/DRC>

“You know, [rape] is also because of the suffering from being hungry, not having anything, living like animals [tozovivre lokola banyama] ... Even the dogs here eat better than us! We were hungry yesterday, today hungry and tomorrow hungry [nzala lobi, nzala lelo, nzala lisusu lobi]. Also when we get it, you should see it: look at this! [pointing to plate with dark fufu on the ground]. When we get something this is what we get. Not even the pigs would eat it. Also, is this food for soldiers in combat who have to walk long distances and carry heavy weapons? It also makes people angry and anger makes you want to do bad stuff. Rape is also part of that. But it is not good.”

*The Complexity of Violence: a critical analysis of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, 2010 (Nordic Africa Institute)*

<http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?page=statistics&pid=diva2:319527>

“The majority of women were attacked in their own homes and most attacks happened during the evenings and nights. This pattern is in contrast to that found in other recent conflicts in Africa, where rape is reported primarily when women go out in search of water or firewood, when they are farming their fields or when their village is attacked.”

*Now the World is Without Me: An Investigation of Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo,* Harvard Humanitarian Initiative & Oxfam, 2010

<http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/now-world-without-me>