



Testimony of

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**To the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human
Rights, Democracy and Global Women’s Issues; and
the Subcommittee on African Affairs**

for the Hearing

**“Confronting Rape and Other Forms of Violence
Against Women in Conflict Zones”**

May 13, 2009

***Known as Association des Femmes des Medias du Sud Kivu (AFEM-SK)**



Thank you for having this important hearing. I am grateful for the invitation to be here. The women of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have waited a long time for American policy-makers to take an interest in this situation. I thank Vital Voices Global Partnership for their commitment to empowering women around the world, and for their support of the women of the Congo.

Rape and sexual violence is used as a weapon and tactic of war to destroy the community. The rapes are targeted and intentional, and are meant to remove the people from their mineral-rich land through fear, shame, violence, and the intentional spread of HIV throughout entire families and villages.

The South Kivu Women's Media Association is the voice of thousands of voiceless women. We use radio to give them the space to express what has happened to them, begin their healing and to seek justice. We have interviewed over 400 women in South Kivu, and their stories are terrifying. In fact, the word rape fails to truly describe what is happening, because it is not only rape that occurs, but atrocities also accompany the rapes. That is what makes the situation in the eastern Congo so different, and horrible. Of all the testimonies we recorded there are two that stay in my mind that I will share with you.

I met a woman who had 5 children. They took her into the forest with her 5 children, and kept them there for several days. As each day passed the rebels killed one of her children and forced her to eat her child's flesh. She begged to be killed but they refused and said "No, we can't give you a good death."

Last month, after the joint operation between the Congolese army and the Rwandese army to break down the FDLR¹, in their running away the FDLR raped more women. Our journalists were told that after they raped the women, they put fuel in their vaginas and set them on fire, and then extinguished the fire. This was done not to kill them, but to let them suffer. There were many other horrible atrocities.

The women ask WHY? Why such atrocities? Why do they fight their war on women's bodies? It is because there is a plan to put fear into the community through the woman, because she is the heart of the community. When she is pushed down, the whole community follows.

We also ask, Why the silence of the developed countries? When a gorilla is killed in the mountains, there is an outcry, and people mobilize great resources to protect the animals. Yet more than five hundred thousand women have been raped, and there is silence. After all of this you will make memorials and say "Never Again." But we don't need commemorations; we want you to act now.

¹ Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda, or Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda



There are six actions that I request of you to help end this situation:

1. The first need of the women is security and peace. Rape is not peace! Rape is used just like a gun, to show the force of the rebel groups. We ask for your involvement to station the U.N. peace-keepers not only in the cities and towns to protect business, but also in rural areas where they can actually protect the women.
2. In the Congo, we believe that there will be security when the FDLR returns to Rwanda. I ask that the American government get involved politically, by pressuring the Rwandan government to accept their return and to begin dialogue with the rebels, so that they stop fighting their war in our country, and on women's bodies.
3. We need strong justice to end impunity on rape and sexual violence. We ask the U.S. to join us in pressuring the Congolese government to stop giving amnesty to rebels who use rape as their war strategy. The American and Congolese governments should request International Criminal Court arrest warrants for the Congolese and Rwandan rebel leaders. We also ask you to pressure the International Criminal Court to include rape and sexual violence in the charges filed against these war criminals. Finally, we ask for assistance to pursue the legal reforms needed in Congo to end impunity for rape and sexual violence in war. We need Zero Tolerance on rape and sexual violence--at all levels of the justice system.
4. We ask that the American government and U.S. multinational corporations contribute financially to the recovery and healing of the women and the communities, because your economy benefits from the minerals of the Congo. The women and families need medical and psychological services to heal from the trauma to their bodies and minds. There are also children born of rape who live as orphans, because the community has rejected them and sees them as "ticking bombs" who will grow up to become like the rebels. These women and children are left with nothing.
5. Another part of this recovery is to help Congo to strengthen the formal economy in the eastern provinces, and end the profitability of blood minerals. We ask that you work with the U.S multinational corporations to develop ways to ensure that Congolese minerals imported to the U.S. are "conflict-free" and that the security, infrastructure and capacity and of the eastern provinces is built up through this investment. Economic recovery is part of the total recovery of the women and their communities.
6. Lastly, I would like for the U.S. to have an increased presence in the eastern Congo. Toward that end, I invite the American government and private sector to send a delegation to the East to see the reality on the ground and explore ways to improve security and promote the formal economy. Having a presence in the east would also



allow the U.S. government to have a better sense of what is happening in the area and would help the U.S. to be a better advocate for women and families.

I'd like to conclude by expressing our hope for the future. There are many people and organizations in the eastern Congo working tirelessly for peace, justice, and healing. This good work can be more effective and help even more people, if we have the support we are requesting.

We, the women of the Congo want to work with you, and we need your support to stand with dignity. Stand with us, and help us to heal our nation.

Thank you for your attention.

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