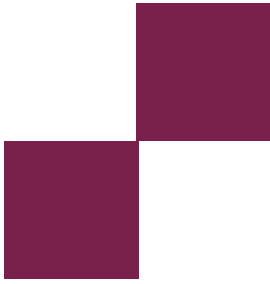


REPORT OF THE MISSION TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

21ST SEPTEMBER 2008 1ST OCTOBER 2008





Abbreviations

AWDF	African Women's Development Fund
CNDP	Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FAS	Femmes Africa Solidarité
FDD	Defense de la Democratie
FNL	Front pour la Liberation Nationale
HDI	Human Development Index
NGOs	Non governmental organisations
OSISA	Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa
RCD	Assemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie
UFEVEOVIG	Union des Femmes Violées, Orphelins et Victimes de la Guerre
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children Education Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Fund for Women
UN	United Nations



Acknowledgements

AWDF would like to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to the following people and organisations:

Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) who coordinated this mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Global Fund for Women, Ministry for Gender, Guinea, Coordinating Assembly of NGOs, Swaziland, Association of Women's Club, Zimbabwe

The Congolese Women's Rights Organisations who organised and facilitated our mission in DRC: Action Contre l'Impunite pour les Droits Humains, Initiatives des Femmes pour la Participation Kasai.

All the numerous women's groups, parliamentarians, hospital staff, activists and civil society groups that took time to meet with us during the mission.



Foreword

From the 21st of September to the 1st of October, 2008, the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) in conjunction with the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), Global Fund for Women and women's rights activists from Guinea, Swaziland and Zimbabwe undertook a mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The aims of the mission were to:

Show solidarity with Congolese women's rights organisations, gender activists and feminists whilst encouraging them to build strong women's movements

Obtain a 'first hand' perspective of women's rights challenges in the DRC and to structure programmes to effectively support women's rights work in the country

Gain a clearer understanding of women's rights challenges particularly in the mining and resource extraction centre

The mission which commenced in the capital of the DRC, Kinshasa and extended to Mbuji-Mayi, a mining town in Kasai –Oriental enabled AWDF and our partners to interact with women's rights activists, parliamentarians, educators, medical personnel and survivors of gender based violence on the status of Congolese women and the particular challenges they face in the context of a history of civil war, political instability and sustained gender based violence.

This report has been compiled to capture in words and pictures the many stories heard and witnessed by the AWDF.

About the African Women's Development Fund

The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) is a grant-making foundation, which aims to support the work of the African Women's movement. The vision of AWDF is for African women to live in a world in which there is social justice, equality and respect for women's human rights. To this end, our mission is to mobilise financial resources to support local, national and international initiatives led by women, which will lead to the achievement of this vision. The Fund was set up by three African Women who have been active in various institutions within and outside Africa, and who have a track record of successful empowerment interventions, which have helped strengthen the African Women's Movement.

AWDF's objectives are to raise money and make grants for the support of non-profit African women's organisations working for social justice, equality and peace. This objective is achieved in four main ways;

Fundraising within and outside Africa

Grant-making on an Africa-wide basis

Communication, focusing on the work and achievements of African women's organisations.

Providing technical assistance to strengthen grantee organisations

Grants are awarded to African women's organisations working in the following thematic areas:

Women's Human Right

Economic Empowerment

Political Empowerment

Peace-Building

Health, Sexual and Reproductive Rights

HIV/AIDS

AWDF has funded over 800 women's organisations in 41 African countries. AWDF's grants range from U\$1,000- U\$50,000, and multi-year grants of up to \$120,000 can be made to grantees engaged in strategic work.



The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is located within Central Africa and is bordered by the Central African Republic and Sudan to the North, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi to the East, Zambia and Angola to the South, the Republic of the Congo to the West and is separated from Tanzania by Lake Tanganyika to the East.¹

The DRC gained independence from Belgium on the 30th of June 1960 but has been

Background to the Democratic Republic of Congo

consistently plagued by coups, civil war and political instability. Following a coup in 1965 Joseph Mobutu seized power and remained in power for over thirty years. In 1997 Mobutu’s rule over the DRC came to an end and Laurent Désiré Kabila came into power, renaming the country Democratic Republic of the Congo.

A five-year war between DRC government forces and rebels began in August 1998 with a number of African countries including Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe taking sides with the government, with Uganda and Rwanda taking sides with the rebels.

In January 2001, President Laurent Kabila was assassinated and was succeeded by his son Joseph Kabila who gained a mandate through the ballot box to preside over the country in 2006. Joseph Kabila’s Presidency however has not brought an end to the civil strife in the DRC with sporadic fighting and renewed fighting ongoing in the Eastern Region of the country. In the same month that AWDF completed its mission to the DRC, renewed fighting broke out in Goma resulting in the displacement of thousands of civilians. More recently (January 2009) the military operation by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and

¹<http://www.worldinfozone.com/country.php?country=DRC&page=2> Accessed on 30th January 2009

Rwanda against ethnic Rwandan Hutu militias has resulted in further displacement in the South Kivu province with at least 5,000 people fleeing from their homes.³

This history of violence and political instability has resulted in the DRC being one of the poorest countries in the world. The United Nation's Human Development Index (HDI) ranks the DRC as 177th out of 179 countries.⁴ This is despite the DRC being one of the richest countries in terms of natural resources which include Diamonds, Coltrane and Copper. In fact the resources of the DRC are believed to be one of the major causes for the persistent conflict in

the country with many factions, countries and corporations believed to be profiting from the war.⁵ Rwanda for example, is believed to be a key player in the DRC conflict through its former alliance with the Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (National Congress for the Defence of the People, CNDP) and incursions into the DRC in pursuit of Hutu militants. Some reports have also indicated that mining companies take advantage of the 'instability and weak institutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo to reap huge profits while paying little attention to the ecological and human cost of their actions'⁶

Impact Of Conflict On Women In The DRC



The constant barrage of warfare in the DRC has been fought on the bodies of Congolese women with the prevalence and intensity of rape and other sexual violence in the country described as amongst the worst in the world. It has been reported that an average of 1,100 rape cases occur each month in the 11 Congolese provinces⁷, with 13,247 rape cases in 2007⁸.

The majority of sexual violence atrocities are believed to be centred in the Eastern part of the country in particular North and South Kivu provinces, a site of ongoing and persistent conflict between forces such as the Rassemblement Con-

²see Appendix for a Statement by AWDF and partners 'End Impunity on Women's Rights Violations in Eastern DRC'

³<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=29719&Cr=Democratic&Cr1=Congo> Accessed on 30th January 2009

⁴<http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> Accessed on 15th January 2008

⁵<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/52092> Accessed on 16th January 2009

⁶<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/52092> Accessed on 30th January 2009

golais pour la Démocratie (Congolese Rally for Democracy, RCD), the Rwandan army, rebel Rwandans associated with the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and Burundian armed groups.

A report by Human Rights Watch⁹ into sexual violence in the Eastern region of the DRC indicates that:

» Sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war by most of the forces involved in the conflict including the RCD, Rwandan soldiers; Mai-Mai¹⁰, armed groups of Rwandan Hutus, Burundian rebels of the Forces pour la Defense de la Democratie (Forces for the Defense of Democracy, FDD) and Front pour la Libération Nationale (Front for National Liberation, FNL).

» Soldiers and combatants sometimes rape women as part of a more general attack in which civilians are killed or injured and property destroyed. This is done to terrorise communities into accepting their control or punish them for real or supposed aid to opposing forces. At other times, soldiers and combatants rape women and girls found in fields, along the roads or in their homes.

» Combatants abduct women and girls and force them to provide sexual and domestic services.

» Rapists aggravate their crimes by acts of unspeakable brutality such as shooting

victims in the vagina or mutilating them with knives and blades.

» Rape and sexual crimes are increasingly carried out by police and others in positions of power with opportunistic criminals taking advantage of the culture of impunity towards women and girls¹¹

The twenty sixth report of the Secretary General on the United Nation's Mission to the DRC in June 2008 reinforced the extent of impunity towards women's rights in the DRC:

‘ Despite increasing national and international awareness and concern over sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, perpetrators, especially agents of the State, continue to go largely unpunished... Impunity for sexual violence is underlined by continued reports of local authorities either facilitating non-judicial agreements between victims and perpetrators, or directly protecting perpetrators from prosecution’.¹²

This situation has encouraged continued violence against women and resulted in a lack of justice for those women who have been brave enough to seek judicial justice. Reports from NGOs and activists indicate that a lack of judicial justice for women and cultural stigma associated with rape means that women are not encouraged to report incidences of rape and sexual violence.

⁷There were 11 provinces in the DRC until the government changed the constitution in 2006 to reflect 26 provinces. However this is not reflected in DRC's documentation/statistics <http://www.cred.be/docs/cedat/brief/drc/Brief%20Analysis%20of%20the%20DRC.pdf> Accessed on 30th January 2009

⁸<http://www.monuc.org/news.aspx?newsID=16920> Accessed on 21st January 2009

Human Rights Watch (2002) *The War within the War: Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo*

¹⁰Op Cit. Originally a reference to numerous locally based groups of combatants defending their communities against outsiders

¹¹<http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602.pdf> Accessed on 2nd February 2009

¹²<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/403/27/IMG/N0840327.pdf?OpenElement> Accessed on 30th January 2009



I was arrested in 2005. We were arrested and raped by about 200 men. On weekends, mostly Saturdays they will give us charcoal and dirt to eat. They will also bring their children who will undress us and finger us. They would beat us and cut us with knives. I had a 5 year old child who was killed and cut into pieces. I was asked to cook the meat and eat it. They threatened to kill me so I was forced to eat a piece of my own child.

MISSION TO THE DRC

In Order to obtain a broad perspective on issues affecting women in the DRC, the team met and consulted widely with key stakeholders in the two regions visited. These include women parliamentarians, women's rights organisations, medical personnel, universities, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), local government officials and

civil society groups. Meeting with these diverse groups provided a clearer picture of the various challenges facing women and girls in the DRC as well as the steps that stakeholders including the AWDF need to take. A summary of key concerns, issues and discussions are outlined below.

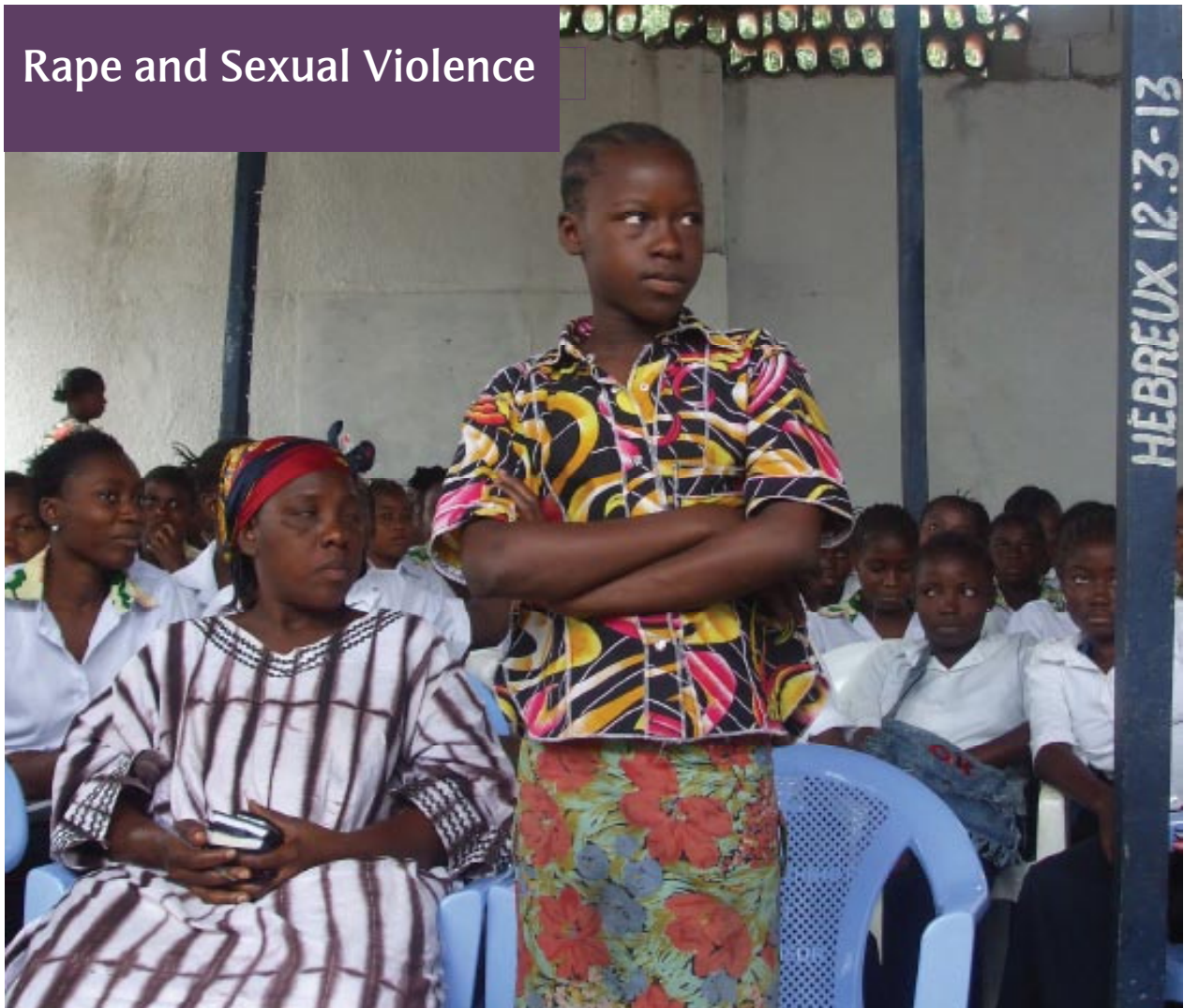
In Kinshasa we visited a centre run by Mad-

am Zawadi, a sexual violence survivor and founder of *Union des Femmes Violées, Orphelins et Victimes de la Guerre* (UFEVEOVIG) which loosely translates as the Union of Raped Women, Orphans and Victims of the War. Two personal testimonies were shared with us. The first is by an older woman who is now HIV positive, possibly as a result of the rape and sexual violence she experienced.

One day we were able to escape. We run for days until we reached Kinsanga where we reported to the authorities. They said there is no room here; your captors will follow you so I was put into a boat. I was very sick...the boat broke down and we changed boats until we docked at a harbour. I don't know which harbour it was. I was taken somewhere and someone rang the lady (referring to Madam Zawadi). I was wearing sacks. The lady came over with some t-shirts and cloths. My friends who I had left behind had their mouths and vaginas cut. We have no one to help us. I was really sick and for 8 months could not leave my room.

The second testimony was by a young girl, a survivor of rape also a beneficiary of Madam Zawadi's centre:

Rape and Sexual Violence



'On the 16th of May 2007, I went to school and upon my return a man from the neighbourhood asked me to come for a piece of cloth which my Dad would use to sew a shirt for him. When I went to his house, he took the cloth which he said he was going to give to me, covered my mouth and cuffed me. He threatened me with a knife and took me to his bedroom. I was there for three days and abused constantly. I left on the 18th of May at about 10pm. He took me on his back and left me about 100 meters from my house. When I got home my father asked me where I was coming from and I told him that the man had kept me at his house. We went to the police station and returned to the neighbour's house where he was arrested.

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The next morning the man came with his lawyer and took me to the hospital without any members of my family. The lawyer told me that if you continue to testify when we go back to the police station I will kill you and throw you in the river. When we

returned to the police station I was beaten and intimidated. I was detained and only released two days later at 11pm. We went to another police station where we filed a report. The man was then taken to prison but released a month later. This was when I met Madam Zawadi who came to see me and took me to hospital where I got tested but had no sexual diseases. Thanks to Mama Zawadi, the case is in court for justice to prevail.

Visits to Hôpital St Joseph in Kinshasa and Hôpital de la Muya allowed the Hôpital St Joseph in Kinshasa is a general hospital which has a specialist unit focusing on sexual violence. The hospital receives support from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). In 2007, 307 cases of sexual violence were dealt with by the hospital. The number of cases reduced to 292 in 2008.



Since 2005 the hospital has been providing free medical and psychological support to women victims of sexual violence. On a daily basis it also performs surgery for women who are suffering from fistula¹³. Challenges identified by staff at Hôpital St Joseph include:

- » Shortage of drugs
- » The high work load of hospital staff and limited health facilities
- » Increases in the number of sexual violence cases being dealt with as a result of increased media attention on the subject. Health personnel saw this as a 'catch 22' situation. Greater awareness of sexual violence is a good thing but they do not have the facilities and resources to deal with more survivors of sexual violence.

In Mbuji Mayi the team visited Hôpital de la Muya, a public facility which provides care and support for victims of sexual violence. According to the Chief Medical Officer,

four years ago the issue of sexual violence was not as serious as it is now. He stressed that amongst the Kasai (one of the largest ethnic groups in Mbuji Mayi) traditional practices degrade women and that women are not considered as fully human. The hospital provides its support free of charge as it is a state entity. Sometimes support in the form of funding and medical supplies are received from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF)

Visiting Hôpital de la Muya brought home the extent and scale of rape and sexual violence in many parts of the DRC. Hôpital de la Muya has been supported by donor agencies particularly the UNFPA to provide free services and medication to survivors of sexual violence. Nurses and doctors have



¹³Fistulae are holes that are created between the vaginal wall and the bladder (vesicovaginal fistula VVF), and holes created between the vaginal wall and the rectum (rectovaginal fistula RVF). As defined at <http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fistula> Accessed 11th February 2009



been trained to provide basic treatment to survivors of sexual violence. Survivors come from a variety of backgrounds. Child victims are brought in by the police or their parents and street children come in by themselves or with a delegation. 95% of the victims are female with victims sometimes being as young as 3 years old. A 2007 report by the hospital cited the following statistics for sexual violence.

- Ages 1 – 9: 105 cases
- Ages 10 – 17: 515 cases
- Ages 18 – 24: 127 cases
- Ages 25 – 49: 105 cases
- 50+: 6 cases

On the day we visited the hospital, there had been 7 survivors of sexual violence who had attended the hospital the previous day. Being fully aware that our delega-

tion was visiting the hospital the doctor had asked the 7 patients and their parents whether they will be willing to meet with the delegation. The youngest survivors we met were 3 and 5 years old.

As the doctor explained, many of these young girls end up with collapsed vaginas as a result of the assault they have endured. For some women their uterus becomes damaged after rape. We were told about one such case of a woman who had been so severely raped that her uterus was damaged but only came to the hospital 2 months after the incident. She refused to admit that she had been raped by several men as traditionally raped women are divorced by their husbands.

The Doctor cited attitudes towards women in the Kasai region as the cause of the high levels of rapes and sexual violence. In his words:

¹⁴*A payment of money or gifts received from the perpetrator or his family*

Violence happens because men in the Kasai regard women as objects. I can say this because I am Kasai...families want dowries replaced when girls have been raped'.

The hospital has been doing some sterling work on sexual violence apart from providing free services and medication to sexual violence survivors. A commission has been set up and part of what they have been doing includes trying to explain that a raped woman has not committed adultery (which is the traditional view). Traditionally if a man decides to 'take back' his raped wife, the dowry will have to be repaid to the man. The belief is that the man will die if he doesn't take back the dowry.

The room, in which we met with the Doctor and Nurse working on sexual violence, was the same room where survivors of sexual violence are seen and on the wall is a poster which shows the various punishments for committing sexual assaults. As was pointed

out to us, the laws are not upheld and several aggressors are released after being held in jail for a day or two. Other challenges identified by the Chief Medical Officer include cultural practices of collecting bride price from rapists¹⁴ as well as the corruption and weaknesses of the legal system which results in many rapists going free. In the doctor's opinion women were reluctant to admit to being raped as they would face stigma such as abandonment by their partners and families who on the whole view rape as a source of shame for the victim as opposed to the perpetrator. In a situation where it is more than likely that the rapist will bribe his way out of court and appropriate punishment, the victim has more to lose than to gain in openly admitting to having been raped.

In order to better address the needs of survivors of sexual violence the hospital has developed a programme to create awareness on sexual violence and to train community educators on counselling victims of sexual violence.

Civil Society and Women's Organisations in Mbuji Mayi



The mission had a convening with civil society organisations as well as women's groups in Mbuji Mayi. The aim of the meeting was to identify key issues for women's organisations and civil society groups about the status of women's rights in their region. The convening attracted representation from approximately 40 organisations which were mainly small grassroots based women's organisations. Representatives from each organisation had the opportunity to address the gathering and present the key challenges/concerns faced by their organisations in addressing women's rights. Issues raised can be summarised as below:

- » Lack of education and high level of illiteracy among women and children
- » Ignorance of rights
- » High level of poverty among women who have no access to resources such land, water and technology. This brings about the problem of trafficking and child prostitution
- » Overburdening of women who are often the sole bread winners of the family

Lack of effective cooperation and networking amongst women's organisations
The participants at the convening believed the challenges raised could be addressed by:

- » Awareness creation on women's human rights and violence against women
- » Capacity Building for women which will encourage women to participate in decision making and politics.
- » Support for micro credit facilities for women
- » Support for women's reproductive health projects
- » Vocational and skill training for young girls

The majority of the women's groups present also highlighted the fact that there were no opportunities for collaboration with other development partners. Coupled with this was the lack of financial resources to carry out projects. Support in terms of resource mobilisation is needed to turn the dreams of women's organisations into reality.

Central and Local Government Perspectives

Parliamentarians in Kinshasa

The mission met with two groups in the Assemblée Nationale, namely Network for Gender and Equality (Réseau Parlementaire Genre et Parité) and the Women's Caucus. These were groups set up to boost women's self confidence in parliament, encourage women's involvement in decision making and to strive for gender parity.

The Congolese Parliament has 500 members out of which 48 are women, while in the Senate there are only 5 women out of a total of 108 members. The parliamentarians pointed out that these low figures of women parliamentarians are in spite of Article 14 of the Congolese Constitution, which stipulates that there must be gender parity within the political system. According to the parliamentarians, although there have been



'Some members of the Kinshasa Gender Caucus...members are women and men'

series of conversations around Article 14 of the constitution, nothing has been done yet. Practically speaking there is no gender parity in the political arena. The Women's Caucus stressed that as women parliamentarians they had come together to advocate on social issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic and greater numbers of women in parliament would lead to greater attention paid to issues predominantly affecting women such as sexual violence and HIV/AIDS.

» Financial constraints - During the political campaign process, many women candidates were handicapped by their male counterparts who appeared to have greater financial resources at their disposal.

» Low levels of education and self confidence - Women tend to be less visible in parliament, appear timid and hardly make contributions to debates. This latter challenge can also be attributed to a lack of knowledge in some subject areas. The other challenge raised by the parliamen-



'Women Members of Parliament, members of the women's caucus in the Kinshasa Parliament'

tarians is the challenge of language. Many women parliamentarians cannot easily express themselves in French; however they feel more comfortable in Lingala, a local language.

» Ignorance of civic and political rights - The Network for Gender and Equality and Women's Caucus pointed out that the majority of women who live in rural areas, have limited access to information especially on women's empowerment. This is acknowledged to handicap women's participation in the electoral process. As part of the effort to enhance the capacities of women in parliament the Network for Gender and Equality is providing capacity building training for prospective female candidates in preparation for the next Congolese elections. Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), an AWDF partner, has also been running some training programmes for women parliamentarians in gender budgeting.

» Cultural challenges - Cultural norms also limit women within the DRC with many more women than men affected with issues of poverty and social injustice.

» Trust and support from women - Women lack support from their fellow women who prefer to vote for men. It is important for women to associate with and support other women who seek political office.

» Networking – Women parliamentarians in the DRC have not had the opportunity to network with other parliamentary networks in Africa.

» Lack of funds to implement policies - Although there are policies in place to promote women's rights, funds to implement them are not available. For example in the Senate, the Cultural Committee is led by two dynamic women who had worked hard for the adoption of a policy on HIV/AIDS and women. The Women Caucus is also lobbying hard to have a Plan of Action and an effective implementation of the law on violence against women. In the same vein, women parliamentarians are currently not being supported by any donors.

Needs identified by Parliamentary groups

» The Network for Gender and Equality identified a need to enhance collaboration with other men to ensure effective leadership. The men who are members of this network have been nicknamed 'Millennium Men' because of their ability to defend women's issues.

» Capacity building programmes for women parliamentarians in the political settings and legal frameworks of the country.

» A need to facilitate links with institutions such as Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative, Akina Mama Wa Africa and Femme Africa Solidarité for leadership training.

» A need to mobilise resources to support their work

Local Government Perspectives in Mbuji Mayi



“They were aware of the issues, there is the political will to address them but this will be a long term action”

During our courtesy call with the Deputy Governor of the province the team was informed that the issue of child labour is being discussed at the

Courtesy calls were made to the Provincial Assembly and the Deputy Governor of Mbuji Mayi, Bruno Kazadi Bukasa. It was important to do this in order to obtain the support of the local government on our mission in Mbuji Mayi. Making contact with local government also provided us with the opportunity to provide feedback on our mission and a platform to advocate with Congolese women.

The Provincial Assembly of Mbuji Mayi comprises of 66 parliamentarians, of who 6 are women. The Assembly has the mandate to make decisions which could help address the issue of child labour for example as well as a range of gender issues. The team informed the executives of the Assembly of the objectives underpinning our visit to Mbuji Mayi. The President of the assembly stated:

level of the provincial assembly. The local government is also working on ways of reintegrating child labourers into society in order to ensure a decent standard of living for children. In his words, “women are the bedrock of society”, they live in extreme poverty and are often the breadwinners of their families and their communities.

The Minister of Education Youth, Sports and Leisure in the Mbuji-Mayi Provincial Assembly highlighted challenges with girls’ education in the locality, which is perceived by her as getting worse with the entrenchment of traditional perceptions that only male children have the right to education. The Ministry of Education in partnership with UNICEF has initiated an awareness campaign on girl child education which has led to an increase in the numbers of girls enrolled in school. One of the urgent needs noted by the Minister was the need to support the educational

few

schools and many students.

The Provincial Minister of Justice, Denis Milambo - Yangongo asserted that women's rights issues are taken seriously at the level of the state. He pointed out that although the constitution makes provision for gender parity and affirmative action; a lack of funding has resulted in the inability to implement the necessary of policies and law.



Meeting with UNIFEM

The United Nations (UN) is one of the key international actors which oversee the peace building and reconstruction processes in the DRC. UNIFEM as the UN agency with responsibility for gender issues is also responsible for providing humanitarian support to conflict zones. UNIFEM's work in the DRC has included:

- » Provision of humanitarian support in conflict areas
- » Capacity building programmes for women parliamentarians and prospective female candidates
- » Advocacy programmes on women's human rights
- » Support for women's economic empowerment projects. This is a new area which has been added to UNIFEM's role in the DRC
- » Awareness creation on violence against women

UNIFEM played a key role in strengthening women's capacities and providing support for the active participation of women in peace negotiations and political participation. UNIFEM facilitated the Congolese women's participation in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue by providing both technical

and financial support, which enabled women representing different political and civil society groups from 11 different provinces, to be involved in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. This enabled the voices of Congolese women to be heard, especially in those difficult times when men were fighting over power-sharing, ignoring the needs of those who continued to suffer during the years of conflict.

In spite of its good will to support DRC especially during the transitional period, UNIFEM faces certain key challenges which hinder its activities. These have included:

- » A weak judicial system which makes room for continued impunity
- » Inadequate participation of women in decision making and in the peace building process to effectively address the issue of violence against women
- » Socio cultural norms which allow rape cases to be dealt with by traditional rulers.
- » Strong traditional beliefs which treat women as second class citizens
- » Persistent demands by donors for proof of impact. Issues around gender, attitudinal and social change do not lend themselves easily to quantitative analysis



University Education IN MBUJI MAYI



The State funded University of Mbuji Mayi and the privately funded Tshikama University were visited to allow the mission to gain an understanding of issues surrounding women's access to higher education in Mbuji-Mayi. The University, founded in 2005 was formerly an extension of the University of Lubumbashi. It has 5 faculties, namely medicine, agriculture, economics, law, and social/political sciences. It has a total enrollment of 3000 students, of which only 10% are women. The current housing for the university is wholly inadequate as the premises in a previous life was a primary school. The university has only 8 permanent lecturers and has to call on visiting lecturers from Lubumbashi and Ki

to provide teaching support. There is currently no research centre for students and lecturers. However as part of its achievement the Dean was proud to announce that amongst the first batch of students to graduate in agricultural science was the first woman university graduate in Mbuji Mayi who is a degree holder in agriculture.

The Academic Dean noted the following challenges:

» Lack of adequate infrastructure

Inadequate salaries for lecturers

Lack of funding to improve Scholarships to encourage more women into university

» School fees support for women and girls (Approximately US\$ 200 per year per student)



Tshikama University is a private university in Mbuji Mayi which appears to be better resourced than the Mbuji Mayi state university. The physical surroundings and the buildings of Tshikama were in a much better condition than the state funded university.

The University shared with the mission the results of research recently undertaken into the high rate of child trafficking in the mining sectors of Mbuji Mayi. The objective of the research was to gather qualitative information on the issue and come up with strategies to address child trafficking in the mines. The research findings indicated that the majority of children working in the mines are around 12 years old. Both boys and girls who work in the mines are used mainly as porters of water and stones. 33% of the girls working in the mining areas sell food during the day and

at night turned to sex work to subsidise their income. 60% of girls interviewed stated that they had unprotected sex with their partners.

Tshikama Private University also expressed challenges in increasing the enrollment of women with women currently representing only 17 per cent of the total enrollment. Its faculty of medicine is working on a programme to assist girls and women survivors of sexual violence.

Artisinal Mining And Its Impact On

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Women's Rights

Bakua Tshimuna, is an artisanal mining town within the Mbuji Mayi Province. The town attracts people seeking diamonds with men mainly engaged in artisinal mining. The mission visited the site on the recommendation of Congolese women's groups who alerted us to the hazardous conditions in which women miners worked. Although many parts of the DRC have abysmal road infrastructure, this mining site was particularly hard to reach and from the nearest site where the miners lived, accessing the mining sites involved walking for approximately an hour and a half



¹⁶Women at the convening for women's organisations and civil society also spoke about girls being sexually preyed on and referred to as ducklings and piglets. The research carried out by Tshikama University also reported this finding

alongside ravines, on hilly slopes and besides a lagoon. At our arrival at the site we were told that there were not any women miners to speak to as the women were not working at the site that day. The reason we were given was that there was a shortage of gas in the area. It was unclear as to how a gas shortage would prevent women miners from visiting the mines.

Nevertheless, we spoke to an adult woman in the vicinity of the mines who was the first person to tell us about ‘ducklings’ and ‘piglets’.¹⁶ ‘Ducklings’ in the Mbuji Mayi mining context are very young pre-pubescent girls of about 6 - 8 years old and ‘piglets’

are plump adolescent girls of about 12 - 15 year olds. The miners request ‘ducklings’ or ‘piglets’ from adult women who bring them the girls of their choice.

Women and girls within the mining town of Mbuji Mayi work predominantly in the sex industry or as traders of foods and other goods in the informal sector. During our trek to the mining site we came across a few young girls who were selling bread. The route to Bakua Tshimuna is dotted by women trading in food items.

Congolese Women’s Activism



It was encouraging to see the dynamism of local women activists such as Madam Zawadi founder of *Union des Femmes Violées, Orphelins et Victimes de la Guerre* (UFEVEOVIG) and Madam Rose Mbuyi Kanku, Coordinator of Initiatives des Femmes pour la Participation Kasai (Women’s Initiative for Active Community participation in Kasai) who with minimal resources are running programmes to support victims of sexual violence, encouraging women’s political participation and empowering women locally.



As part of AWDF’s efforts to promote women’s rights in the DRC, the fund has provided grants to a variety of Congolese women’s groups working on a range of issues including economic empowerment, HIV/AIDS and health/reproductive rights.

Support has also been provided to grantee partners working in the DRC including Femme Africa Solidarité (FAS). FAS has been working in the DRC since the negotiations in Sun City, South Africa in 2002 where it pledged to bring Congolese women around a common agenda for their effective participation in the peace process. Through this partnership, women in the DRC have been able to develop platforms at the national level to support their participation in peace negotiations and the transitional mechanisms of governance, and establish the framework “Women

Congolese Dialogue”, a group of women’s associations.

AWDF Grants Awarded in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Organisation: Aube Nouvelle pour la Femme et le Développement

Aube Nouvelle pour la Femme et le Développement is a local organisation formed in 1995 by a group of women to enhance the socio-economic status of women in South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its main goal is to promote the empowerment and rights of disadvantaged rural and urban women’s groups

Grant awarded : US\$8,000 to support its beneficiaries through income generating activities.

Organisation : Association des Jeunes Femmes du Maniema

Association des Jeunes Femmes du Maniema was formed in 1997 to improve the living conditions of women and children in Maniema. The objectives of the group are to promote, defend and protect women's human rights, to provide access to education to the girl child as well as to support victims of sexual violence. It also seeks to create awareness on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS through the production of IEC materials.

Grant awarded : US\$5,000 to organise a training workshop on human rights, to organise a radio programme and for institutional support.

Organisation : Association Femme et Promotion

Association Femme et Promotion was formed in 1993 to address the issues of poverty among women and awareness creation on women's human rights. Its main objectives include promoting and fighting for women's rights including civic rights and providing vocation training for young girls. Its areas of activities include women's human rights and economic empowerment.

Grant awarded : US\$5,000 to cover construction work for a nutritional centre, and to train women in human rights.

Organisation : Centre pour le Développement Rural de Loango Ouest (CEDERLO)

CEDERLO is a local organisation set up in 2003 to promote women and girls reproductive health and rights, to fight against HIV/AIDS, and promote women's human rights. The organisation's activities revolves around health, reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS, economic empowerment, women's rights, political participation and peace building. CEDERLO also carries out projects on sanitation and provides food for children.

Grant awarded : US\$5,000 to equip a reproductive health centre

Organisation : Actions Pour La Réinsertion Sociale de la Femme (ARSF)

Actions pour la Reinsertion Sociale de la Femme is a local organisation formed in 2003 by Ms Takubusoga Bibyshe who has been ostracized by her community on account of her fight against the violation of women's rights. She set up this organisation to fight discrimination against women. The main objectives of the organisation are to ensure the social integration of ostracized women and those who have been affected by violent conflict, poverty alleviation among women, teenage mothers and girl victims of sexual violence as well those living with HIV/AIDS. The group also aims to contribute towards women's empowerment and to promote women's health.

Grant awarded : US\$9,000 to train selected leaders of women's groups in conflict resolution and to set up peacebuilding units

in strategic regions affected by the conflict in the DRC

Organisation : Grace Vie Positive

Grace Vie Positive is a community based organisation set up in 2004 by four HIV positive widows, concerned about the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and the myths surrounding the pandemic. Its main goals are to provide psychological support to people living with HIV/AIDS, to raise awareness on HIV/AIDS and to educate HIV positive women on their rights. People living with HIV/AIDS are the target beneficiaries of the organisation's activities. Its main areas of activities include awareness raising on HIV/AIDS and on the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, including care and support for HIV infected women..

Grant awarded : US\$5,000 for training of peer educators and awareness raising on HIV/AIDS.

Organisation: Forum d'initiative pour la Femme Africaine

Forum d'Initiative pour la Femme Africaine was formed to defend women's rights in general. The main objectives of the organisation are to promote women's political participation, to create awareness on HIV AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Its main areas of activity include women's human

rights and economic empowerment.

Grant awarded : US \$700 to organise a workshop and a radio and TV programme on HIV/AIDS and women.

Organisation: Femme dans le Monde Social

Femme dans le Monde Social was set up in 2002 to remove all obstacles to women's empowerment in DRC and to fight against HIV AIDS. It also seeks to promote women's economic empowerment through support for their income generating activities and the provision of technical assistance to deprived women.

Grant Awarded: US\$500 to organise a workshop on HIV/AIDS.

Organisation: Protection Enfants Sida (PES)

PES is a national organisation formed in 2001 to protect children, especially teenagers against AIDS and to promote girls' education. It seeks to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and the youth through active participation of girls and women in information and experience sharing sessions

Grant Awarded: US\$500 to organise a workshop and drama on HIV/AIDS

Summary of Observations

» Women's rights activists and women's rights organisations in the DRC are working in extremely challenging situations which includes dealing with political instability, extremely high levels of sexual violence/rape and a culture of impunity towards the violation of women's human rights.

» Many women's rights organisations we met have minimal financial resources and face constant challenges around resource mobilisation and the further development of their organisation.

» Congolese culture like many other cultures around the world is patriarchal and does not encourage women's empowerment and participation in decision-making positions in society.

Sexual violence, low levels of education and women's lack of access to decision making positions in society appear to be amongst the key areas of concern for women right's activists in the DRC.

The few women in decision making positions e.g. women parliamentarians need support systems and networks that will assist them in working within highly patriarchal structures.

Special support is needed for women and girls working within the mining sector as they are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Survivors of sexual violence and rape need support, access to healthcare and justice for the atrocities they have suffered.

Women's rights organisations in the DRC are fragmented and need support in building a viable and dynamic movement in the country.

Recommendations to AWDF and other donors

AWDF and partners can provide special funding to the women's rights organisations in the DRC for the purposes of building a stronger women's movement.

AWDF can challenge other funders to invest more resources into the DRC.

AWDF should highlight the findings of the DRC mission at various international and regional forums.

AWDF can convene our grantees and other women's rights organisation in the DRC for capacity building purposes on resource mobilisation

DRC in words and pictures



'Members of Women's Groups in Bakua Tshimuna'



'Young girl selling bread to the miners and her younger brother who had been asked to accompany her for her security'



'Mama Dorothée, women's rights activist'



'Mama Rose, women's rights activist'



'First woman to get a first degree from the Mbuji Mayi University'

DRC in words and pictures



'School children and adult women who are beneficiaries of UFEVEOVIG'



Appendix 1

This is a copy of a letter sent to the secretariats of the United Nations, African Union and Southern African Development Community after violence resumed in Goma in October 2008

End Impunity on Women's Rights Violations in Eastern DRC

We represent women's human rights organisations and their NGO partners in Africa. Our work on a daily basis confronts gender inequality and seeks to ensure the protection of women's rights and bodily integrity. Nowhere are these rights more violated today than in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). From 21 September to 1 October 2008, our organisations were in fact in the DRC as part of a delegation of women from the African continent, and witnessed first-hand some of these challenges, and received testimonies from women survivors of these violations.

We condemn the renewed outbreak of violence in the East of the country, and we are particularly concerned with the human rights and situation of women and girls who have been the targets of a concerted campaign to use rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war over the past decade.

We issue this letter to the SADC, the African Union secretariats and the United Nations, demanding that they take urgent action to broker a political solution to the long-standing crisis in the DRC, in order to protect the lives of all Congolese.

To this end, we call upon:

The African Union to condemn the use of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war, and immediately call for a cease-fire. Articles 14 of the AU Peace and Security Protocol (PSC) recognises the need to assist vulnerable persons including children and women in states that have been adversely affected by conflict;

The African Union to actively monitor the immediate implementation of the Great Lakes Pact, beginning with condemning military support to the CNDP;

The DRC government and Parliament to fully comply with their constitutional duty to protect their people, especially women and girls, without any discrimination;

The CNDP to cease using civilians as pawns in their military objectives;

Countries surrounding the DRC to refrain from fuelling conflict by providing weapons, and not to target women and girls' bodies as sites of war;

Women's organisations across the continent and in the SADC region to amplify the voices of women and girls in the Congo, and support their struggles, especially in this fresh and renewed crisis;

The UN to move quickly to protect women from rape sexual violence in line with its own Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings (2005) that calls upon communities, governments and humanitarian organisations, including UN agencies, NGOs, and CBOs, to establish and coordinate a set of minimum multi-sectoral interventions to prevent and respond to sexual violence during the early phase of an emergency. We specifically call

upon the UNHCR to ensure that the UNHCR Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons: Guidelines for Prevention and Response (2003), which details the various responses that, in the event of abuse or violence against women, are required to help victims, including the need for legal redress and access to medical and psycho-social support are fully implemented in DRC.

The UN to push for the implementation of resolution 1325 (Articles 9 & 10) that calls on all parties of armed conflict to apply international law, recognize the conventions and protect the rights of women and girls in armed conflict.

All actors; national and international, to take into account and document cases of sexual violence to enable implementation of Resolution 1820 that recognises rape and sexual violence can constitute war crimes and should be dealt with as such. This will facilitate access to justice and ending impunity on SGBV in situations of armed conflicts.

Humanitarian agencies to provide immediate relief, including medical aid, to survivors of violence to address women's immediate needs.

The Situation of Women and Girls in the Country

Women in the DRC currently face a myriad of challenges, ranging from sexual and other forms of violence, poor social service, a lack of social security, poor health and high levels of poverty.

Human rights advocacy has always been a risky domain in Congo for most of its modern history.

Women live under the dual cloak of politically-imposed silence, as well as silence due to their gender. Eastern Congo, a region

twice the size of Uganda, has borne the brunt of brutal military campaigns since 1998. Tens of thousands of women have been raped by multiple armies from Congo and neighboring countries, often as part of a strategy to humiliate communities and destroy social structures and norms. Many of these women are still in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, still recovering from this trauma and particularly struggling with their sexual and reproductive health. In IDP camps their protection is still not fully guaranteed and some continue to suffer further violence by those who are supposed to protect them. The region has seen massive population displacement, disruption of agricultural activities, and acute poverty. As a result, the standard of living has drastically lowered, with food security becoming a daily struggle, primarily for women and girls whose rights to land and livelihoods have always been tenuous. Overall, across the country, women face social marginalisation and reap very few benefits from their labor. The summary below is indicative:

International Alert, Human Rights Watch, UNICEF and the United Nations have documented the systematic use of rape as a strategy of war in Eastern DRC since 1996.

A 2004 WHO report gave a modest estimate that over 40,000 women were raped: NGOs in the DRC estimate more.

61 percent of HIV positive persons are women; and 30 percent of rape survivors in Eastern DRC are HIV+;

DRC ranks among the top 6 countries worldwide with the highest maternal mortality rates;

DRC has 85 percent unemployment, the majority being women;

45 percent of women in the DRC are illiterate;

In Dec. 2005, 60 percent of voters in a national referendum on a new Constitution

were women; an indicator of their hopes for democracy;
In July 2006, 13.5 percent of candidates for legislative seats were women.

Since the violence flared up again two months ago, an estimated 200 000 people have been on the move – many of them women and girls. There are now over 1 million IDPs in the Eastern DRC, as estimated by the UN;

Despite the signing of numerous peace accords, including the Great Lakes Pact, the Nairobi communiqué and the Amani process, the tensions in the East have continued to simmer since 1994, with outbreaks of war in 1996, 1998, 2003, 2006 and again in 2008, this time led by General Laurent Nkunda's CNDP;

At risk are human rights defenders – especially women's rights defenders who speak against the massive rape and sexual violence in the region – members of civil society organisations who provide humanitarian and legal assistance to the local population, and tens of thousands of ordinary civilians, including women and children, many of whom are victims of sexual violence which continues to be used as a weapon of war.

SIGNED:

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Appendix 2

AGENDA: MISSION TO THE DRC

Date	Activity	Hour	Organisation	Venue
21 Sept	Arrival in DRC	14:00	Hôtel Memling	Memling
	Debriefing meeting with local organisers	16:00	RAF, ACIDH, RODHECIC	Memling
	Free evening	18 :00 onwards		
22 Sept	Meetings with UN and officials	9:00 - 10:00	MONUC	MONUC offices
		10:30 - 11:15	UNIFEM	UNIFEM Office
		11:30	Minister of Gender	Cabinet of the Minister
		16 :00	Meeting with women's rights organisations	
23 sept	Meeting with groups and networks	8:30	RAF, CAFCO, UCOFEM, Cause Commune, WOPPA, UCOFEM, UNPC, Centre Lokole, ACIDH, CDHC, SWAA-Congo, CEDI, CEAD.	To be determined
		13:00	Lunch	
		14:30 -15 :30	Visit	
		16 :30 – 17 :30	Caucus of women in parliament	
24 Sept	Projects visits continued	9:00 to 12 :00	Hospital for victims of sexual violence	St Joseph

	Projects visit	14 :00 to 16 :00	To define from the general meeting	
		From 18:00	FREE	FREE
25 Sept	Departure to Mbuji-Mayi	9 :00 to 12 :00	Equinoxe Hotel	
		14:00	Meeting with CEDI, CEAD, SOLIDEK, CODESCI, CEFIDE, CRONGD, ADEKOR, CRONGD, IFEM, BDOM, CSOs coordination etc.	At the hotel or CRONGD
26 Sept	Visit to Bakwa Tshimuna	9 :00	Bakwa Tshimuna	Bakwa Tshimuna
	Visit to the Governor	15 :00	Governor	Office
	Wrap up	18 :00	End of the day	
27 Sept	Visit to Tshibombo (Osis project)	9 :00		
		12 :00	Lunch	
	Visit to a training center for young girls (Quartier Zaire)	14:00		
	Visit to a medical center, Maternity.	16:00		
28 Sept.	Sunday	FREE	FREE	FREE
29 Sept	Visit to the University of Mbuji -Mayi	9:00 to 10:00	TSHIKAMA	

	Visit to official university of Mbuji-Mayi.	10:15 - 11:00	UOM	
		12:00 - 14:00	LUNCH	
	Visit to the local parliament		Parliament House	
30 Sept	Return to Kinshasa			
1 October	Return to home bases			