

Enough: tackling sexual violence in eastern DRC

By Grace Davies,
Created 2008-03-20 17:51

A new report aiming to protect women and girls in eastern DRC argues that policies to prevent sexual violence be closely linked to established and ongoing conflict resolution and peacemaking initiatives already underway.

In a roll-call of the world's bloodiest and most intractable conflicts, the decade-long civil war fought in the Democratic Republic of Congo will surely rank depressingly high. Despite an official ceasefire declaration in 2002 and a further peace deal with rebel factions in the east at the start of this year, a cycle of deadly violence continues. DRC is also the site of an epidemic of sexual violence [1] against women and girls, where rape, routinely used as a weapon of war by nearly all forces involved in the conflict, has become endemic.

This ongoing humanitarian crisis is not news to the international community. A 2002 Human Rights Watch report detailed the "culture of violence against women and girls" labelling it "the war within the war [2]". Yet still very little progress has been made on tackling the epidemic, and there has been a lack of a unified effort to protect women and girls in DRC.

A new report out today from Enough [3], a US-based project working to end genocide and crimes against humanity entitled "Getting Serious about Ending Conflict and Sexual Violence in Congo [4]" aims to change this by calling for an integrated approach to ending the violence through the peacemaking process:

"Because rape is used as a weapon of war in Congo, bringing one of the most complex conflicts in the world to an end will ease the suffering of women and girls and, if sufficient resources are made available, enable women and girls to participate in the healing and reconstruction of their families, communities, and country."

Due to its roots in conflict, much of the violence against women and girls is perpetrated by soldiers, former combatants, police forces and even criminals taking advantage of the fragmented nature of society. It is so accepted that sexual violence is committed with near-total impunity. Because of the threat posed by the police and military, the Enough report argues for a commitment to security sector reform (SSR [5]) from the international community, including strengthening vetting, training of and justice within the military.

Recent figures released by the International Rescue Committee estimate that the conflict in DRC has so far cost 5.4 million lives [6], largely from war-related yet preventable disease, infection and starvation. The ongoing war against women and girls, particularly in the east, is destroying communities, families and lives for years to come. There can be no future for DRC until this war is halted, and women and girls can begin to heal, and to contribute to the healing of their nation.

You can read the full [Enough report here](#) [7].

Source URL:

http://www.opendemocracy.net/blog/grace_davies/enough_tackling_sexual_violence_in_eastern_congo

Links:

[1] <http://www.theirc.org/special-report/rape-in-congo.html>

[2] <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/>

[3] <http://enoughproject.org/about>

[4] <http://www.enoughproject.org/reports/congoserious>

[5] <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3946>

[6] <http://www.theirc.org/special-report/congo-forgotten-crisis.html>

[7] <http://www.enoughproject.org/reports/congoserious>