

AI Index: AFR 62/001/2004

Stop violence against women

Democratic Republic of the Congo – one woman's struggle for justice

[photo caption]

Cover photo: Congolese women in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, June 2003. © AP

[end caption]

Resolute in defence of her rights

A soldier broke into Kavira Muraulu's home late one night and raped her. The next day she went to lodge a complaint about him – he and his friends came back and beat her. Undaunted, she went on complaining. So they bayoneted her in the stomach.

Kavira is a farmer in her fifties who lives near a military camp in Mangangu, near the town of Beni, North-Kivu province, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. In this area, conflict between different armed forces has been raging for more than five years and many woman and girls have been raped, mutilated and killed with complete impunity.

The man who raped Kavira on 16 May 2003 was a soldier from the military camp. When she complained to his military commander, he ordered the soldier to pay her three US dollars in compensation, but took no action when the order was ignored. She took her complaint to the local district governor, who issued reassurances and told her to go home, but made no arrangements to ensure her safety.

[photo caption]

Kavira Muraulu © AI
[end caption]

The rapist and other soldiers then seized her in her fields, tied her up and beat her, knocking out a tooth and injuring her jaw. They only stopped when another woman threatened them with a gun. Kavira was later taken back to the governor's office where he tried, but failed, to persuade her to retract her accusation. The soldiers then attacked her again, this time bayoneting her in the stomach.

Despite continued official pressure and the risk to her life, Kavira is determined to obtain justice and compensation.

All the forces involved in the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo have used mass rape and other forms of sexual violence to terrorize and subdue civilian communities. In South-Kivu province the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that some 5,000 women had been raped between October 2002 and February 2003, an average of 40 a day.

In many cases, rape victims have also been deliberately injured or killed. Thousands of women and girls have been abducted or forced by desperate poverty to become sexual slaves or frontline fighters. The victims' trauma is compounded by the high risk of HIV infection. The medical and psychological treatment they need is almost completely absent throughout the country.

The rapes and other crimes of sexual violence and killings that are being committed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, yet virtually none of those responsible have been brought to justice.

[box]

Support our campaign: together we can make a difference

- **Take an interest:**
Find out and monitor how your community, government, police, security forces and courts respond to violence against women and girls.
- **Take a stand:**
Speak out about violence against women. Challenge prejudiced or dismissive attitudes.
- **Take action:**
Join our global campaign for women's right to freedom from violence and discrimination.

[end box]

[box - common text]

In the home and in the community, in times of war and peace, millions of women and girls are beaten, raped, mutilated and

killed with impunity. Join Amnesty International's campaign to demand action by governments, communities and individuals to stop violence against women throughout the world.

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Take action against war crimes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Call on the transitional government, which includes leaders of armed groups, to:

- clearly instruct forces under their command to end sexual violence against women and girls and to surrender suspected perpetrators to an appropriate, legally constituted judicial authority;
- establish a systematic and comprehensive program of health and psychological care for survivors of sexual violence, in full collaboration with Congolese and international organizations already providing care for victims locally;
- as part of the wider reform of the national judicial system, enable victims of sexual violence to obtain full redress before the courts;
- provide awareness and training programs for members of the security forces, and train judges, prosecutors, the police and others in the criminal justice system on how to respond to complaints of sexual violence.

Send appeals to: M. Joseph Kabila, Président de la République, Présidence de la République, Kinshasa-Ngaliema, République Démocratique

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What you can do

I would like to join the Stop Violence against Women campaign.

Please send me more information.

I would like to join Amnesty International. Please send me details.

I would like to make a donation to support Amnesty International's work.

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Please send your form to the Amnesty International address in the box below, if there is one:

or to Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom
or visit Amnesty International's website at
www.amnesty.org/actforwomen
[end box] *du Congo*