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Burundi: No protection from rape in war and peace

"I discovered that my husband had raped our eight-year-old girl. He told me that because the girl was his daughter, he could do it again if he wanted."

Mother of a rape victim

Amnesty International and ACAT -- Burundi (Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture) today called on the Burundian government to take immediate action to protect women and girls from rape and other sexual violence in Burundi.

Despite the fact that the rape of women and girls is widespread throughout the country, the Burundian authorities have systematically failed to take concrete steps to prevent, investigate and punish these crimes. As a result, perpetrators regularly escape prosecution and punishment by the state and victims are left without protection.

Levels of rape and other forms of sexual violence in Burundi are very high, with girls and young women most at risk -- 60 percent of reported rapes are committed against minors.

"Girls as young as three are the victim of rape today in Burundi," said Arnaud Royer, researcher at Amnesty International.

"Rape is the most reported form of sexual violence in the country and is committed by both state and non-state actors, but is becoming more and more prevalent in the home and community."

Rape was endemic during the years of armed conflict but continues to this day despite the ending of hostilities.

Between 2004 and 2006, an average of 1,346 women a year reported rape or sexual violence to Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) -- 26 per week.

"The frightening statistics on rape in Burundi unfortunately represent only the tip of the iceberg -- they do not include those women unable to reach medical centres after being attacked," said Royer. "Countless women and girls suffer in silence."

Systemic failures in the justice system have created a climate where rape victims are less willing or able to pursue criminal proceedings. The system particularly fails women in rural areas, who are often unaware of how to instigate legal proceedings and are frequently cut off from psychosocial and medical assistance provided by some non-governmental organisations operating in Burundi.

Furthermore, women are often stigmatized by their communities if they make public the attack they endured -- often leading them to keep their suffering a secret and cope with the consequences of the violations alone.

"A common misconception in many communities is that rape is the victim's fault -- a result of the victim's behaviour or clothes she wears," said Royer. "This couldn't be further from the truth and the government and local communities must support women who have been the victim of such human rights violations."

"Violence against women is a violation of human rights that cannot be tolerated. Rape is a crime. Perpetrators must be brought to justice and victims offered help and compensation," said Royer.

To see a copy of the full 35-page report released today, *No Protection from Rape in War and Peace*, please go to: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf160022007>

Public Document

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