



# **STOP RAPE NOW**

U.N. ACTION AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

## **16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence: 25 Nov – 10 Dec 2008 *INACTION IS NOT AN OPTION: END SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN DRC* JOINT STATEMENT BY UN ACTION NETWORK**

Guns and rape have long been wielded as weapons of war. Rape, though, is often overlooked and rarely on the radar of security institutions due to poor-reporting, stigma and a self-serving myth of inevitability. Yet the trauma and terror of rape linger long after guns fall silent.

UN Action has helped catalyze a paradigm shift: giving credence to sexual violence as a security threat that demands a security response, rather than simply an immutable by-product of war. As a concerted effort by 12 UN entities, UN Action seeks to improve coordination, amplify advocacy, and support efforts at the national level to prevent sexual violence and respond to the needs of survivors.

This year, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence (25 November – 10 December) coincide with renewed international attention to conflict-related rape in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). UN Action adds its voice to urgent calls to end the culture of impunity that perpetuates this crime. Rape has deep roots in a historical absence of accountability: year after year, killers and rapists escape punishment in DRC, feeding a cycle of violent lawlessness.

In parts of eastern DRC, rape and other forms of sexual violence are being used as a tactic of war by certain armed groups; while Government forces, charged with safeguarding the security of civilians, have among their number many soldiers who are themselves the purveyors of rape, preying upon women and girls. Occurring in the context of widespread abuses against the civilian population, mass rape is tearing the social fabric of the Kivus. Indeed, sexual violence is both ordered and opportunistic, and often linked with larger military, political and economic agendas driving the conflict. Far from isolated incidents, they form a pernicious pattern: when fighters settle into new positions, rape ensues. Such acts amount to grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. There can be no amnesty for those who commit or commission these crimes.

Ending sexual violence, holding perpetrators to account and ensuring services for survivors are matters of utmost priority. Through its historic Resolution 1820 on Women, Peace and Security, the UN Security Council unanimously acknowledged that sexual violence can exacerbate conflict, impede peace processes and perpetuate insecurity in the wake of war. DRC has witnessed not only rape by arms bearers, but widespread sexual violence by civilians as a chronic social problem. During wave after wave of displacement, those least empowered suffer most. Resolution 1820 contains concrete

measures to turn this tide. It calls for parties to armed conflict to end acts of sexual violence and protect civilians; enforce military discipline; uphold command responsibility; train troops; vet armed and security forces of alleged perpetrators; and evacuate to safety women and children under imminent threat of sexual violence. It also affirms the Council's intention to consider targeted sanctions against perpetrators.

The crisis in DRC represents the clearest collective opportunity to realize the promise of Resolution 1820 since its adoption in June 2008. Now is the moment to match resolutions with resolve and resources. All parties to the conflict are called upon to show leadership and commitment to ending sexual violence. The Government bears particular responsibility for ensuring that its security forces respect the prohibition of rape and other forms of sexual violence. MONUC (the United Nations Organization Mission in the DRC) requires reinforcement and enhanced capabilities to implement its mandate. For its part, UN Action has deployed the first-ever Senior Adviser on Sexual Violence to MONUC. So long as sexual violence retains a strangle-hold on Congo's greatest resource – its women and children – there can be no peace, stability or development. There can be no security without women's security. For UN Action, inaction is simply not an option.

