



# Quotes on Congo

Civilians in eastern Congo, particularly women and girls, are targets of conscience-shocking brutality and sexual violence. Every day, they face a harrowing array of threats from armed militias, the military, and even the police who are supposed to protect them. Understanding the reasons why life has become so dangerous for women in eastern Congo is an essential first step in helping to end the violence and create a more hopeful future.

## 1. Predatory security forces

*"It is more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier right now."*

~ Major General Patrick Cammaert, former UN Deputy Force Commander, describing the situation in eastern Congo, May 2008

The army is guilty of widespread abuses of the people they are supposed to protect, and soldiers often view attacking women as a 'benefit' of carrying a gun for the state.

## 2. Lawless militias

*"This violence was designed to exterminate the population."*

~ Louise Nzigire, social worker at Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, spring 2005

The vast majority of civilians in eastern Congo fear militias more than anything else. Militias have been all too eager to use rape and other forms of violence as tools to intimidate and suppress the local population.

## 3. A culture of impunity

*"In Congo, if someone starts an armed group or kills people, they have a better chance of becoming a senior minister or a general than being put behind bars."*

~ Anneke Van Woudenberg, Human Rights Watch, January 2008

In Congo, law enforcement as we know it is nonexistent, and access to justice is extremely deficient. For most women in the Congo, going to the police with a complaint about a crime is almost unthinkable,

## 4. The resource curse

*"We are cursed because of our gold. All we do is suffer. There is no benefit to us."*

~ Congolese gold miner, June 2005

The scramble to exploit the Democratic Republic of the Congo's vast natural resources has been the principal driver of atrocities and conflict throughout Congo's tortured history.

## 5. Poverty

*"My job is to beg."*

~ Congolese woman, November 2003

Instability and grinding poverty in the Congo have created a stagnant economy, and few companies are willing to invest in this central African nation. The ability to rely on extended families for support and comfort has also often been shattered by dislocation, violence, and chaos.

## 6.A collapsed health care system

*"I was not trained as a gynecologist, but I am being trained on the job, because the need at the hospital is so large. The Congolese government does not provide our hospital with any resources."*

~ Dr. Roger Luhiriri, Panzi Hospital, Buvaku, South Kivu, September 2008

Tens of thousands of women have survived rape and sexual violence, but the Congolese government is unable to provide adequate medical services, rehabilitation programs, or psychological counseling.

## 7. Internal displacement

*"It would be much too dangerous [to return home]. Battles continue to rage there. But we're really not proud of having to stay here."*

~ Josephine, a Congolese woman who has been driven from her home and now lives in a camp for displaced people, June 2008

More than 1.3 million Congolese have been driven from their homes, or "displaced," in eastern Congo.

## 8. A failing education system

*"Out of more than 4.4 million children who are not in school in the Congo, 2.5 million of these children are girls... **The violence, the poverty, the culture—there are many reasons why children are not going to school.**"*

~ UNICEF, 2008

School enrollment rates, from primary school through university, have dropped significantly since the onset of the conflict...It also been proven again and again that investments in basic education for girls have some of the very best returns of all development programs.

## 9. Gender inequality and cultural barriers

*"Women had very few rights. They are not perceived as equal citizens. I think what [...] these atrocities have done is to have, bizarrely, normalized rape. So now it's not just the Congolese army and the factions that are raping the women; now it's becoming normalized. Domestic rape and domestic battery has wildly increased in families."*

~ Eve Ensler, founder of V-Day, September 2007

Women in the Congo are often treated as little more than private property, and they are often denied access to health care, property, education, and information.

## 10. Inaction

*"It's shameful that soldiers anywhere are allowed to [commit atrocities such as rape against civilians]. That's why I want to be president. I want to change this. I want to make security one of my first priorities so that these and other acts come to an end once and for all."*

~ President Joseph Kabila, before he won the national elections and became Congo's first democratically elected president since independence, June 2006

The Congolese Government and the international community have failed to act to end the suffering of Congolese women. The United States should seize this opportunity to play a leading role in ending this violence and ensuring that Congolese women can once again feel safe in their own communities.