

Worldwide coalition against sexual violence

by Armand De Decker



Politicians and civil society representatives must work together in seeking solutions to the scourge of sexual violence.

Prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) will require long-term, multisectoral and coordinated efforts focusing on the economic, health, legal, psychosocial and security concerns of affected populations. In order to achieve tangible results, cooperation at all levels is vital.

In light of this, I took the decision to involve Belgium at the field level in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since 2004 we have been actively involved in an innovative four-year programme [see box] in partnership with UNFPA, UNICEF and OHCHR (office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights). The programme's holistic approach and success in securing effective cooperation between the various international institutions involved and local NGOs were recognised as outstanding in 2006 by UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, who made a personal financial contribution as a testimony of his support. I sincerely hope that this programme will encourage similar initiatives in other countries.

To help build awareness, Belgium co-organised the June 2006 International Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond in cooperation with UNFPA and the European Commission.¹ This conference was followed in December 2006 by a debate at the UN in New York on sexual violence in Liberia. Belgium will fund a number of other debates on sexual violence during 2007 to enable as many countries as possible to present national action plans.

I would like these debates to lead to a real worldwide coalition against sexual violence in conflict which would mobilise not only the UN and civil society representatives but also regional security organisations and international organisations such as the African Union,² the Regional

Development Banks,³ the Council of Europe,⁴ the European Commission⁵ and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.⁶

In 2007 Belgium has a place on the UN Security Council and thus an opportunity to ensure that SC Resolution 1325 on 'Women, peace and security' receives due attention. Resolution 1325 places important emphasis on the role to be played by women at all decision-making levels, in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts and in peace processes. We will also work to ensure that the issue of preventing sexual violence is on the agenda during discussions of the mandates of peacekeeping operations.

At the beginning of this new year, when it is traditional to wish for a better future, I would like to express the hope that we will work together to bring about real progress in the lives of millions of women and in giving true meaning to the concept of 'responsibility to protect' as discussed at the UN Summit in 2005.

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1. See Brussels Call to Action on back cover.
2. www.africa-union.org
3. www.undp.org/partnerships/rdb/
4. www.coe.int
5. <http://ec.europa.eu>
6. www.ipu.org

SGBV programme in DRC

This four-year programme in the Democratic Republic of Congo aims to provide SGBV survivors with much needed medical, psychosocial, socioeconomic and legal support. The programme – funded by the Government of Belgium and implemented jointly by UNFPA, UNICEF and OHCHR – has received the support and participation of the

Congolese Ministries of Social Affairs, Health, Justice and Women's Affairs; nine UN agencies; uniformed personnel including the Congolese military and police; and local NGOs with expertise in addressing sexual violence. Some 25,000 survivors of sexual violence are being served by the project. The 7.8 million Euro (\$9.7 million) project will be:

- collecting and updating data on sexual violence among women, young people and children, and creating information systems to facilitate better data collection and analysis procedures
- enlisting political, military and religious leaders to collaborate in community mobilisation, sensitisation and strengthening of the negotiating position of vulnerable groups
- strengthening medical infrastructure across all three target provinces by providing drugs, supplies and equipment, and by training health workers in psychosocial counselling and the treatment of the medical consequences of rape
- building the technical and logistical capabilities of rehabilitation centres for survivors of rape
- strengthening outreach networks in 150 communities to enable them to better identify and serve survivors and to help build the capacity of families, community members and other actors to support survivors
- establishing legal support by drafting strong laws to punish assailants and providing legal assistance to victims and their families
- facilitating the reintegration of survivors into their communities through literacy and skills training.

See www.unfpa.org/emergencies/symposium06/docs/final_report.pdf (pp14-16) for more details.