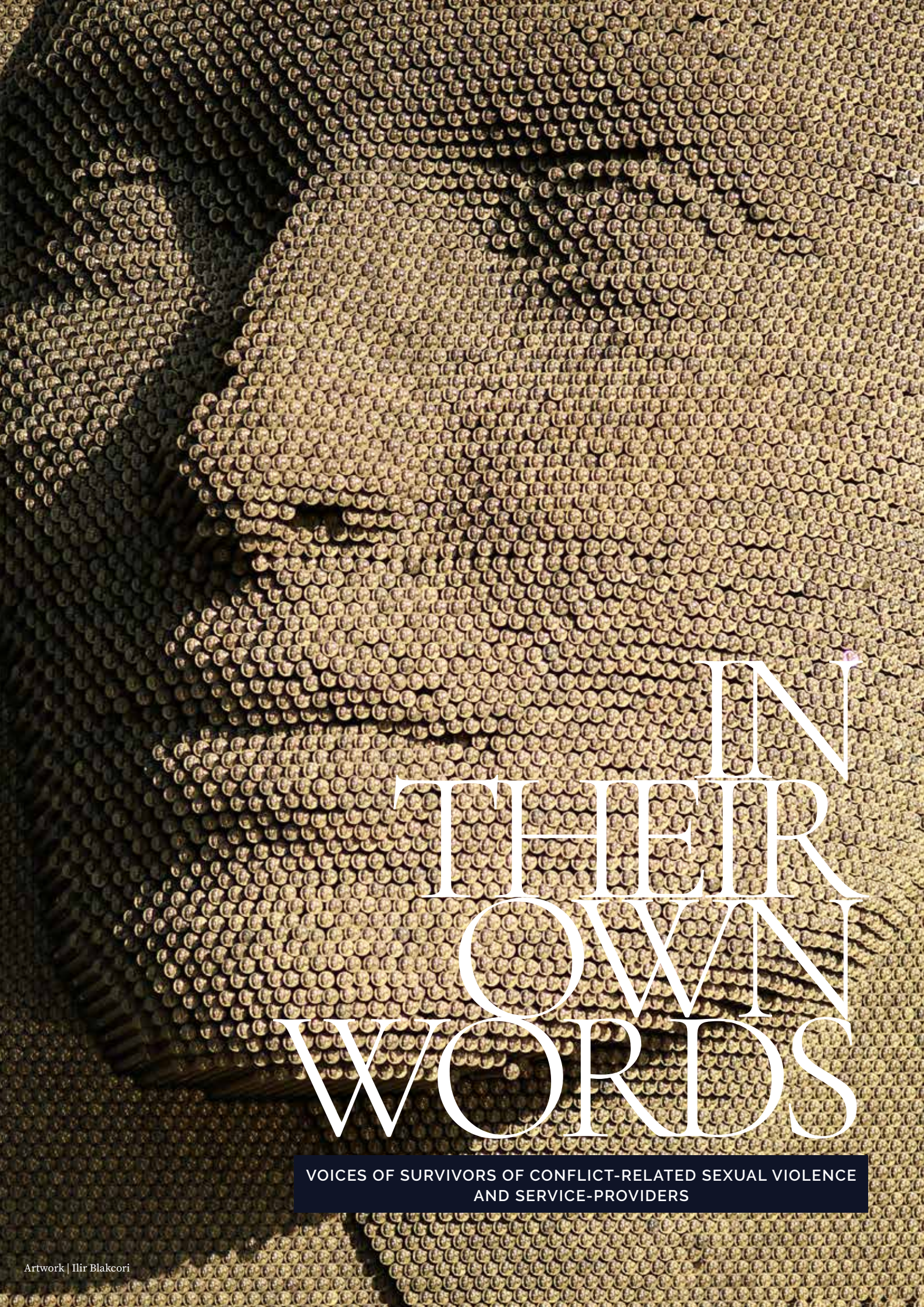


IN THEIR OWN WORDS

VOICES OF SURVIVORS OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SERVICE-PROVIDERS

Artwork | Ilir Blakcori

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

VOICES OF SURVIVORS OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SERVICE-PROVIDERS

FOREWORD

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, I was immediately confronted with the challenge of how to continue effectively delivering my mandate to prevent and address the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence. In particular, I grappled with the question of how to keep the voices and perspectives of survivors at the heart of these efforts. As travel restrictions, lockdowns and remote working arrangements took effect, field missions were suspended, and resources redirected, I became gravely concerned that the plight of sexual violence survivors would be forgotten. Moreover, it soon became clear that this unprecedented public health crisis would exacerbate the humanitarian effects of armed conflict, population displacement, and structural gender-based inequality, slowing the pace of justice and disrupting essential services, as courts and clinics were forced to close their doors. The already chronically underreported crime of wartime rape risked slipping further into the shadows.

This stark reality surfaced just one year after the United Nations Security Council had adopted resolution 2467 (2019), calling for a survivor-centred approach to inform all prevention and response efforts. Such an approach recognizes that the lived experience of survivors must guide the search for solutions, including decisions about policies, programming, and resource allocation. It recognizes that survivors are unique individuals and seeks to empower them by prioritizing their different needs, perspectives and wishes, paying particular attention to intersecting inequalities, in order to ensure their rights are respected, they are treated with dignity, and are able to make informed decisions about their futures. Indeed, the survivor-centred, rights-based approach has been the moral compass guiding my tenure as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict since I took office in June 2017. My vision for this mandate has been to prioritize first-hand encounters with survivors and communities at risk in order to amplify their concerns and bridge their perspectives to policy and decision-making forums. Indeed, in October 2019, I commemorated the 10-year anniversary of the mandate by holding a Survivors' Hearing at United Nations Headquarters in New York, in the spirit of connecting frontline actors from theatres of war with donors, diplomats and political leaders on the world stage.

In that same spirit, the present Digital Book arises from a commitment to be guided by "ground truths" and to keep the voices of survivors at the heart of global efforts, despite COVID-related restrictions and constraints. This platform is a new way of continuing our efforts to bring survivors together across time and space, in order to foster dialogue, a sense of community, and solace in solidarity. It complements the Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, which is compiled annually by my Office, illustrating that behind every statistic there is a mother, son, daughter, sister or friend, each one unique and irreplaceable. It gives a human face and voice to the hard data we gather and report to the Security Council and other global bodies as an evidence-base for action. Through this digital platform, a range of voices that were at risk of being muted and lost to history, call to us louder, more clearly, and more urgently than ever.

In this unique anthology, which spans a dozen countries and includes more than 150 testimonies from conflicts ranging from 1992 to the present, survivors and service-providers speak in their own words.

I believe this Digital Book will make a critical contribution to the historical record, for a crime that has been history's most neglected and least condemned atrocity of war. Official records of battlefield brutalities and peace-table deliberations only tell half the story. The primary source accounts gathered here provide a window onto the unseen, everyday realities of war. They show the incalculable human cost of war's cheapest weapon. We hear in these pages the voices of women, men, girls and boys who cried out for help, only to be stifled and silenced. As one contributor writes, the victim "started shouting for help, but they muted her". Many recount being arrested, threatened, attacked or rejected for speaking their truth to a power maintained at gunpoint.

These personal narratives span a range of experiences, underscoring that survivors cannot be viewed or treated as a homogenous group. They include the experiences of refugees and internally displaced persons, individuals living with disabilities, people who became HIV-positive as a result of rape, rural women attacked while undertaking essential livelihood activities, indigenous survivors, political dissidents and activists, as well as children conceived as a result of wartime rape and their mothers. They cover a harrowing range of crimes, including sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced impregnation, gang-rape by multiple perpetrators, rape in detention as a tactic of interrogation and torture, trafficking, violent extremism and terrorism. Their detailed accounts reinforce our understanding that sexual violence does not occur in a vacuum. It is described in the pages that follow as an integral component of military operations, of ethnic, religious and political persecution, a driver of forced displacement, eviction and land dispossession, and as a gendered and intergenerational harm, with ripple effects for families and communities that subvert social cohesion and prospects for peace.

This book also challenges generalizations and assumptions. In particular, it debunks three persistent myths and misconceptions about conflict-related sexual violence. Firstly, the contributions debunk the widespread perception that it is inevitable and therefore unstoppable, by setting out concrete measures that could have been put in place to prevent these crimes. These risk-mitigation measures include: avoiding troop deployments close to civilian population centres; ensuring adequate infrastructure such as lighting in camps; safely locating waterpoints and wells; distributing fuel-efficient stoves; deploying patrols of police and trained peacekeepers; providing information to civilians about risks and hotspots where armed groups operate; and issuing command orders to prohibit sexual violence, training members of the military on their legal obligations, and holding perpetrators accountable irrespective of their rank. Secondly, these accounts rebut the assumption that if rape goes unreported it is because the survivors do not wish to speak. Many boldly express the hope that the world will hear and heed their story so that, in the words of one contributor, "no other woman has to go through what I went through". The notion that victims are voiceless, passive and silent is likewise debunked by this publication. Thirdly, it challenges the notion that social norms, attitudes and taboos around honour, shame and victim-blame are entrenched and immutable. Many testimonies point to evolving attitudes of acceptance, which encourage reintegration. Validation, justice, economic assistance and livelihood support has helped communities come to see survivors in a different light. This affirms that it is possible to shift the shame and stigma from the victim to the perpetrator. Indeed, these testimonies send a clear signal that the only shame of rape is in committing, commanding or condoning it.

Of the many insights that emerge from this compilation, I am particularly struck by the way that survivors essentially tell two stories: one looking back at the ordeal they endured, and the other outlining how they moved forward in its aftermath, which one survivor described as her "healing journey". Whether or not survivors were treated with dignity and respect by service-providers, the criminal justice system, and their own families and communities, made all the difference on their journey from victim to survivor, and, in many cases, activist, advocate and agent of social change. Through acceptance and support, many survivors have been able to turn the page and to write a new chapter of their lives.

A number of consistent themes echo across these diverse and deeply personal accounts. What stands out to me, above all, is the thirst for justice and the hunger for peace. Most survivors lament that they have never received reparations, or even a word of apology and recognition. It is evident in these pages that most perpetrators walk free, while the victims walk in fear. As a mother, I was profoundly moved, often to tears, by the stories that mothers wrote on behalf of their daughters who are missing or deceased. Their pain is palpable. Yet, more than a book of tears, or a record of brutality, these testimonies are a wake-up call and a call to action. I am therefore launching this Digital Book on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, which is the moment the international community comes together to stand in solidarity with the survivors and those working to support them on the frontlines, often at great personal risk. This year, the focus is on building back better from the COVID-19 crisis through an inclusive, intersectional and gender-informed approach that leaves no one behind. To that end, I invite and welcome other survivors and service-providers to share their stories in this online repository, which will remain a "living document".

As writer, activist and rape survivor Maya Angelou said: *"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you"*. Many of the stories recorded here are being told and brought to light for the first time. As one survivor notes: *"In the peace negotiations no one mentioned rape. I did not have a platform to tell my story"*. I have set out here to provide a platform for survivors to share their stories with the world, in their own words. This book will never be exhaustive, but I do believe that it reveals many unexpected and unsung heroes. As the COVID era is redefining heroism in terms of those who invest in human welfare rather than warfare, caregivers on the frontlines have become our new "profiles in courage", and heroes have been redefined as those who give hope and voice to others. The following pages are full of them. As one survivor put it: *"I hope that one day we will be free and live in a world without rape and injustice"*.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to each and every contributor, and dedicate this book to the survivors who have spoken out, to the service-providers working on their behalf, and to the countless others who continue to suffer in silence. On behalf of my Office, I re-dedicate our advocacy and action to amplifying their voices, breaking the silence that shields the perpetrators, and galvanizing a concerted and comprehensive global response.

These are difficult stories to hear first-hand in the field, and they are no less painful to read on the page. But they are the reason my mandate exists. Their words remind us that indignation is not enough, and inaction is not an option. They are stories of heartache and hope; of fear, trauma, broken dreams, and sleepless nights. We, likewise, must not rest so long as impunity and indifference reign. We must not rest until every survivor, and every civilian, can sleep under the cover of justice.

Pramila Patten
Under-Secretary-General
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
on Sexual Violence in Conflict
June 2021

METHODOLOGY

The cornerstone and cross-cutting principles that guide all the work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC) are "do no harm" and the "survivor-centred approach". When interacting with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, for the purposes of this Digital Book, the OSRSG-SVC was guided at all times by the same principles. With the overall objective being to uphold the dignity and human rights of survivors while protecting them from further harm, stigma and marginalization.

All the testimonies from survivors contained in the Digital Book were facilitated by United Nations Women Protection Advisers (WPAs), United Nations partners in the field, including entities of the UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict Network, and civil society organizations. The testimonies of some service providers were included in the book as a homage and acknowledgement of the critical perspectives of service-providers on the frontlines, who are often under-resourced, under-equipped and under fire. All contributors provided their genuine, full, and informed consent with the understanding that their testimonies would be posted on a web site that was publicly and globally available.

While testimonies of survivors in the Digital Book are presented in their own voice, due diligence have been exercised and some accounts of survivors have been edited to preserve their safety and security without altering the substance of their submission. Good judgment, caution and sensitivity determined the review of all testimonies provided by victims/survivors. For example, in a number of testimonies, personally identifiable information has been removed due to the potential risks of further harm to victims/survivors. For the same reasons, although many survivors wished to use their real name, their names and those of third parties have been removed. Only pseudonyms provided by survivors as well as the names of those survivors who have become public advocates, and have shared their story publicly in other forums, have been kept in the Digital Book.

None of the testimonies contained in the Digital Book have been specifically verified by the OSRSG-SVC or any United Nations entity before publication. All the testimonies in the Digital Book and the opinions therein represent only the views of the individuals who submitted them and not necessarily those of the United Nations or any other entity. The Digital Book is about the testimonies of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence told in an unvarnished fashion.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of its frontiers or boundaries.

Finally, this publication is meant to be a living document to which survivors can contribute. For inquiries, please contact Ms. Geraldine Boezio, of the OSRSG-SVC at geraldine.boezio@un.org

El Grito

Poema por Shirley Campbell-Barr
Costa Rica, 2021

Yo no quería que estas historias se convirtieran
en poesía
No quería que este dolor se transformara solo
en palabras
sin los cuerpos ni las almas
nunca tuve la intención de banalizar gritos ni
historias
ni cuerpos, ni golpes
al intentar escribir estas palabras.

Juro que mi voluntad nunca fue
trivializar la sangre o las miradas
o los cuerpos rotos
de mujeres rotas
despedazadas
como quien desecha
como quien descarta
o como quien manifiesta y testimonia
historias de heroísmo
y sobrevivencia.

Quiero asegurarles aquí
y para siempre
que mi cuerpo de mujer presente
arde
al intentar
sin verdad posible
sentir el miedo y el dolor
y la impotencia y la soledad
y el dolor una vez más
y la ausencia
y la desolación
y la traición de todos
y otra vez los golpes
y la valentía
y la resistencia y la perseverancia
de mujeres rotas
y valientas y enteras.

Mi cuerpo de mujer presente
tiembla y se tambalea
al intentar,
solo al pretender sentir
la vida sin vida
ya sin sensaciones
la sobrevivencia de noches eternas
de días sin días
de horas sin tiempo
de interminables segundos.

Dije
y repito a gritos
que nunca quise
hacer de los cuerpos violentados
de los gritos de mujeres profanadas
y lanzadas a la muerte
...un poema.

Nunca quise
hacer del dolor
un canto sin sentido
hacer de vidas
levantadas de la muerte
un simple conjunto de palabras
que a larga
terminarían sin decir nada.

Yo solo quería
lo juro
levantar mi voz
y gritar con la voz de muchas
y declarar mi irrenunciable voluntad
de ser una mínima parte
de esta transfiguración necesaria
de ser una parte significante
del grito que reclama
que exige
y que implora.
Que implora
que exige
que reclama.
Que grita
que exige
y que maldice.

Yo solo quería
ser parte de la multitud de voces
que no quieren callarse
que deciden denunciar y maldecir
a un sistema perverso
que prefiere callar
y ser cómplice
y no ejercer su humanidad completa.

Yo solo quería dar voz
a quienes
tienen la suya casi ahogada
de tanto dolor
de tanta muerte
de tanto maldito silencio.

Silencio lleno de convenientes verdades
de apropiadas mentiras
de verdades tan falsas
que no quieren ser reveladas.
Yo solo quería gritar
el dolor
y la vida
y la muerte
solo quería ser la mujer completa
que decide
rugir
blasfemar
maldecir
denunciar y denunciar
y que finalmente
se niega
a callar.

Yo solo quería
con un simple poema
hacernos
escuchar.

The Scream

Poem by Shirley Campbell-Barr
Costa Rica, 2021

I did not intend for these stories to become poetry
I didn't wish for the pain to turn into mere words
without the bodies or the souls
I never intended to banalize screams or stories
nor bodies, nor blows
as I try to write these words.

I swear my intention was never
to trivialize the blood or the stares
or the broken bodies of broken women
shattered.

As someone who rejects
someone who discards
or as the someone
who makes a manifesto
or gives testimony
of stories of heroism
and survival.

I choose to assure you
here and forever
that my wholly present woman body
burns
when trying
without a possible truth
to feel the fear and the pain
and the helplessness and the loneliness
and the pain once more
and the absence
and the desolation
and the betrayal of all
and again the blows
and the courage
and endurance and perseverance
of broken women
brave and whole.

My wholly present woman body
trembles and staggers
when trying,
when just pretending,
to feel
life without living
no longer able to feel
survival through eternal nights
of days without days
of hours without time
of endless seconds.

I said
and I repeat loudly
that I never intended
to make of the ravaged bodies
and of the cries of desecrated women
thrown to death

...a poem.

I never intended to
make of the pain
a nonsensical song
to make of the lives
raised from the dead
a simple set of words
that would end up saying
nothing at all.

I swear
I just intended
to raise my voice
and to shout with the voice of many
and to declare my inalienable will
to be a small part
of this necessary transfiguration
to be a significant part
of the cry that claims
that demands
and that implores.

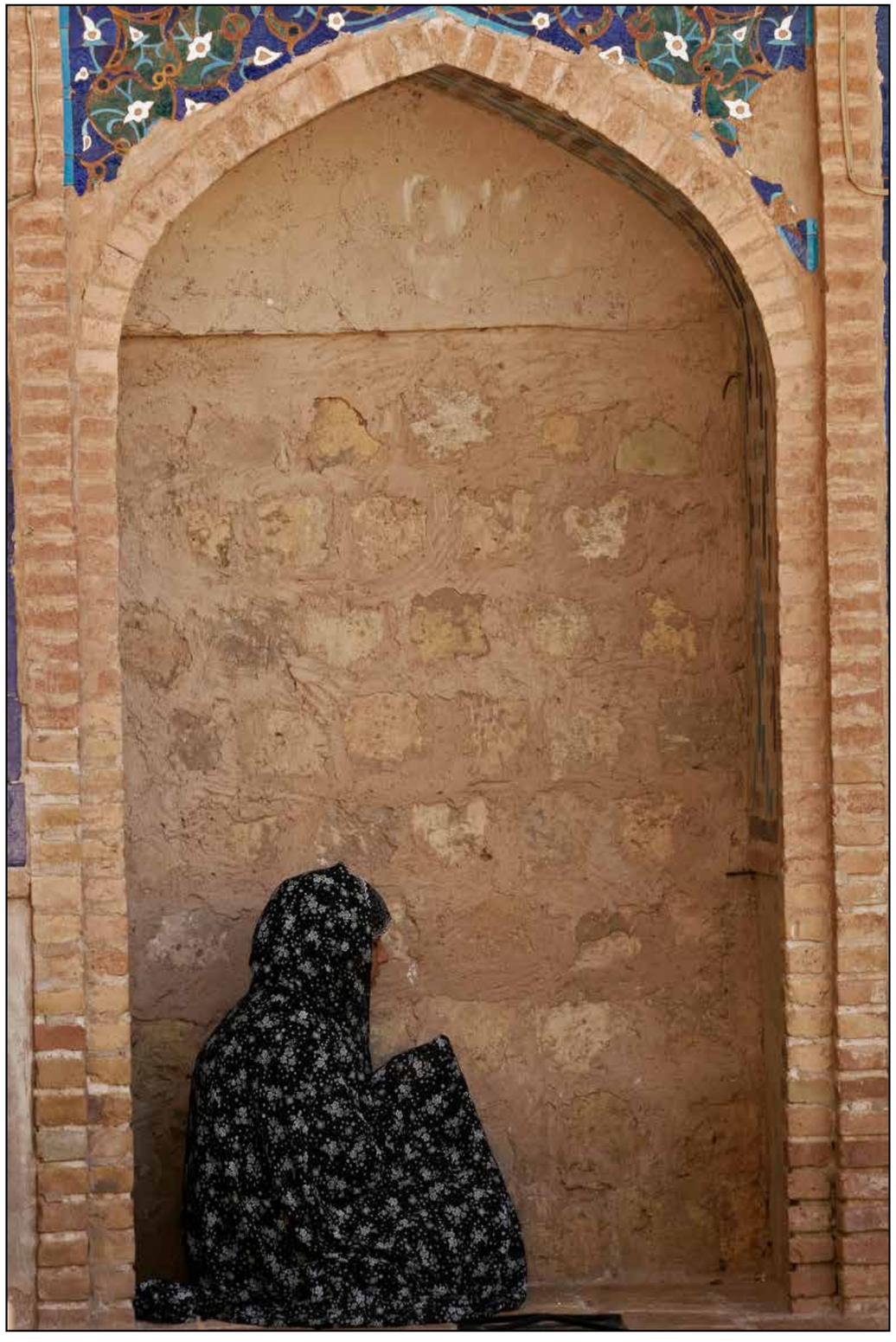
That implores
that demands
that requests
that screams
that demands
and that curses.
I just intended
to be one of the multitude of voices
that choose not to remain silent
that decided to denounce and to curse
a perverse system
that prefers to remain quiet
to be an accomplice
that chooses
not to exercise its full humanity.

I just wanted to give voice
to those who
have had theirs almost drowned
from so much pain
from so much death
from so much damn silence.

Silence full of convenient truths
of appropriate lies
full of truths so false
that wish not to be revealed.

I just intended to scream the pain
and the life
and death
I just wanted to be the whole
woman
that decides
to roar
to blaspheme
to curse
to expose and to denounce
and that finally
refuses
to shut up.

I just intended
with a simple poem
to make us
be heard.



UNAMA Photo Fraidoon Poya

AFGHANISTAN

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY WOMEN AND CHILDREN LEGAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION (WCLRF)

XXX is 14 years old. She attended school and is literate. She is from Kunduz but now lives in Kabul. She has a male cousin who used to be Bacha Baz, or sex slave, to a local commander named XXX, and four of his sons. One day in 2018 this cousin asked her to come over to read the information on a medicine bottle for his mother, as they are both illiterate. XXX was given permission by her mother and went to her cousin's home. There, she was drugged. She woke up in a house she didn't recognize. That night, the commander and his four sons came into the room where she was being held. They tied her up, drugged her again, and when she woke up, she realized she had been gang raped. She was continuously raped over a period of six days. When she cried or shouted, her cousin told her she would be killed if she resisted. The commander told her that because of her beauty, they could not help their actions. She was also violently assaulted during and after the rapes. Meanwhile, her family had gone to the police station to file a complaint. When the commander learned that her case had been reported to the police, he forced her to marry her cousin. The commander said that she had willingly run away from home. She was hospitalized, but in the hospital she was accused of sex/Zina. She was then sent to prison. Her case went to court, where she was also accused of running away and Zina. She appealed, and after six months, her lawyer managed to have her case transferred from Kunduz to a court in Kabul. She was also assisted by the police in Kunduz, who introduced her to a women's NGO that runs a shelter. She has praised the police's handling of her case, but said it was the judiciary that turned her from a victim to a perpetrator. She was assigned a new lawyer and given space in a women's shelter. Her case is presently being prosecuted. She says she feels hopeless. She breaks into tears any time she tries to speak of the rapes. She cannot socialize with others and has had suicidal thoughts. She wants her forced marriage to her cousin to be annulled, and she wants the commander and his sons to be punished.

Tamana (pseudonym) is an 18-year-old girl who lived in Faryab province along with her family. Her parents were poor and illiterate; they wanted her to go to school in order to be educated and serve her community in the future. Unfortunately, a powerful local commander lived in her neighborhood and had many bodyguards. The commander used to rape 'beautiful' girls and warned the families to not formalize the cases. One day in 2021, while she was going to school, the commander saw her, and planned to kidnap her in order to rape her. One night, the commander, along with his bodyguards, entered Tamana's house in order to kidnap her. The commander warned her parents to not make noises or inform other or he would take their second daughter and rape her as well. So, Tamana's parents hid the case and did not tell anyone. The commander took Tamana to an unknown place where he and his bodyguards raped her in turn for a couple of days. She was not in normal condition and required emergency medical care. So, she was taken to the local clinic. The doctors took care of her till she was recovered physically. Then, the clinic informed the district police. She was then taken to police station in order to be investigated about the case. The local police authority invited her father to the police station as well. Her father said: "When the police wanted to investigate my daughter in a secret room, I urged him to let me in but the police rejected and took her to inside the room and asked me to stay outside the door. I waited for an hour behind the door. But I could not hear any sounds. So, I got concerned and entered the room after knocking the door many times. But there was no one inside the room, just my daughter who was unconscious and lying flat on the floor. The investigator raped my daughter and had already fled from the behind door. It was a very tragic scene in my lifetime that I was the witness. So, I screamed and informed other policemen in the campus. But they accused me and my daughter of tell lies. No one heard my case. It was difficult for me to live there. So, we took all our stuff and moved to Kabul in order to work and run my family". All these events caused Tamana to face psychological problem. One of her relatives who was living in Kabul' took her to the psychologist. The psychologist recognized that she had severe mental health issues and required long-term consultation and treatment. So, he introduced her to one of national NGOs which had shelters and free consultation for her. The NGO prepared her case and brought her to the primary court. The primary court asked the headquarter of Faryab in order to arrest the commander and present him in the court based on the court's schedule. During the proceedings, the commander said that his bodyguards did it but he himself was not involved in this case, despite the fact that she claimed that the commander was indeed involved and raped her many times. He could prove himself innocent by force and bribery, but his bodyguards were sentenced to jail. She is still suffering from psychological problems and wants the commander to be punished.

Sound of Silence
Photos | Armin Smailović

THE PHOTOS ARE NOT ASSOCIATED WITH THE TESTIMONIES

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA), BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

My name is Fiki (pseudonym), I was born in 1977, and I am a woman from a village located in the municipality of Tuzla. I am a survivor of conflict-related sexual violence. During the war, and during our journey and the chaos, nobody could protect us. We were walking through the woods, hiding, there were no police, and then, all the sudden, there were patrols coming. We did not know who they were. We did not know if they wanted to attack us or to help us. I do not know how we could have protected ourselves. If anybody had protected us, there probably would not have been a war, no chaos in which people fled in different directions. You did not know where to go; it was not good anywhere.

It is difficult to leave your home when you do not know where to go. In May of 1992, I fled my village with my mother, brother, and sister. During our journey, we were captured and taken to the Sušica concentration camp, where we were held for 10 days. Dragan Nikolić was the camp manager. One day, Nikolić took me out of the camp, led me to the guardhouse, and handed me over to some people who remain unknown. At the guardhouse, one of the guards kept watch while the other one raped me. Instantly, my mother knew what had happened to me. We did not talk about it. Later, we were released from the Sušica concentration camp. From the camp, we walked all the way to Cerska. When we arrived, we were put up in a local school, where we stayed for 10 days. On our tenth day in Cerska, I went to my house with some Bosnia and Herzegovina Army troops to collect some food for my family and to visit my father who had stayed behind. Upon arrival, the troops took me captive and shot my father dead on his very own doorstep. The soldiers took me back to the Sušica concentration camp where this time I was held for 21 days. There, the camp manager found my name on the list, smiled, and said, "you see, she is back here..." and I was separated and raped again. That time, they brought me to a private house near the camp. The soldiers who took me wore uniforms, but I did not see an insignia on them. While I was at Sušica I also watched the soldiers physically abuse other people. There,

I was raped, physically and mentally tortured, and starved by the soldiers. After 21 days in Sušica, I was taken to Pelemiš—to the military demarcation line—and from there I journeyed to Kladanj and then to Živinice. From the time of my second capture and transfer to the Sušica concentration camp, until my arrival in Tuzla, I did not know anything about what was happening with my mother, brother and sister. In 1995, I found them, and together we moved to a neighborhood in Tuzla and rented a house.

One month later, I reported the incident to a doctor and a nurse when they visited the school in Živinice, where I was receiving services due to my status as a displaced person. Upon my arrival in Tuzla, I went to a center where people were providing services to victims of war crimes. There, a gynecologist examined me. Two nurses were also there, and later helped me find an apartment. I shared the apartment that they helped me find with two other women from Srebrenica during the next three years. Upon my arrival in Tuzla, I had access to healthcare services through the center which provided services to the victims of war crimes. At that time, I did not receive any psychological or legal support. It was not before 2002 that the Power of Women Association began providing psychological and later economic support. I have health insurance coverage through my husband, which is the reason I do not need to pay for medical examination.

However, I am always ill. I do not need anything when I am ill, but I am always seeing doctors, taking medicine; I often dream about what happened to me. I am worried, I see images…

After what had happened to me, I felt rejected. I thought that everyone avoided me because of my experience, that nobody needed me, that I was bad. I lost confidence in myself and others. I never sought justice because I do not know who the perpetrators are, which is also the reason it would be nearly impossible to file a lawsuit. To this day, I do not know who my perpetrators were. Dragan Nikolić, who was the camp manager, handed me over to unknown men who were wearing camouflage patterned uniforms. I didn't notice an insignia. I was too scared to notice anything. I am afraid of the costs of trying to seek justice, and how all of that would look like. I also did not want to launch into the process of filing a lawsuit either. I have the status of a civilian victim of war, and I receive a benefit. Still, I have not exercised my right to compensation.

Now, while living in this pandemic, I feel lonely and abandoned. We are locked down at home, we do not see each other. You protect yourself from the disease, you are afraid of anyone you meet. The best is to stay home, but I still want to keep company, to meet with my women, my friends, my sister, my mother. I want to go to the market. But, on second thought, it is better to stay home, I feel safer. I have children, grandchildren. If they fall ill, God forbid, what would I do? The only good things were the Viber group, which was organized by the Power of Women, and the meetings at the Power of Women Association which took place on Diana. They saved us, we are safe there, we are together there, we talk and define next steps…that was the best of all.

UNICEF Photo | LeMoyne

SOUND OF SILENCE
PHOTOS BY: ARMIN SMAILOVIĆ

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA), BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

My name is Peri (pseudonym), I was born in 1969, and I am a woman from the Republica Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The attack happened while my husband was being held in a concentration camp in Zenica. He had been grabbed off the street while he was on his way to buy a loaf of bread on a nearby street. Since then, I had been home alone. I was scared and had been staying at my in-laws' house because I did not want to sleep in my house alone. On 20 July 1992 at around 2 a.m., some unknown people kicked the door opened and broke into the house. They began to steal different items, and they also searched for money. I had already finished some packing and putting things in the children's backpacks. Inside the backpacks there was gold and an amount equal to 150 Bosnia and Herzegovina Convertible Mark (BAM). They took it all. They destroyed everything inside the house and broke all the items that were special to me. They then turned to us. They forced me into my father-in-law's room. I watched as they beat them—my mother-in-law and my father-in-law. My father-in-law had a silver tooth and they shouted, "Look! He has got a gold tooth, he has a lot of money". They separated us and took me into the bathroom. I stood there, petrified. One of them sexually assaulted me. Then, another one came in. He raped me too. He forced his penis into my mouth and then he raped me anally. He said he was going to f**k me like no other Chetnik before him. While my father-in-law was escaping, the attackers loaded their vehicle with the things they had stolen.

Everyone in the neighborhood knew each other. Someone I knew - from the neighboring village where I had my residence registered and where I went to school - waited for the attackers inside their vehicle. Our neighbors, Croats, arrived and we told them what had happened. Nobody realized what had happened to me, but they all saw that my clothing was ripped. The neighbors called the police. An inspector and an investigator came the next day. The investigator took me to the police and showed me photos, asking whether I could identify the criminals. I remembered that one of them was a member of the HOS (Croatian Defense Force) and the other one was a member of the Territorial Defense Force. They both wore uniforms and headbands.

On Wednesday, they took me to the hospital for an examination. They treated me well. I received health care services at the public hospital in Zenica, which means that I did not have to pay. We also received healthcare services in the local primary health center in the village of Janjići. I did not receive psychological or psychiatric services back then. It was not before I came here that I started using those services. In the time following the attack, the authorities located the perpetrators and returned some of the items that the perpetrators had stolen from us. They returned my wedding ring but did not return the rest of the gold that I had received as wedding gifts.

The trial took place on 14 October 1992. I came face-to-face with my perpetrators and was unable to stand trial. Shortly thereafter, in November, we left our home before my husband was released from the camp in Zenica. We were scared and had to leave everything behind. We took the road to Pale and from there we went to Kozluk and later to Ruma (the Republic of Serbia), and later we returned to Janja. The trial ended with the conviction of some of the perpetrators. One perpetrator was sentenced to three years and the other one was sentenced to more than one year in prison. At that time, there were no costs associated with reporting the crime or trial.

Since then, I have exercised my right to a disability benefit as a civilian victim of the war, so I receive a monthly benefit of 130 Bosnia and Herzegovina Convertible Mark (BAM). Here, I have nothing. But my lawyer has told me that a statute of limitations expired in my case and that I have no right to compensatory damages. A few years later, in 1996, I launched a procedure throughout the International Red Cross for obtaining the documents that I had left in Zenica. I never thought something like that could have happened while I was staying at my father-in-law and mother-in-law's house; I felt safe. I never thought it would happen because, nothing indicated that we were in any danger. After it happened to me, more people started to leave. They had become aware of the risks of staying.

After the attack, sometimes things were different. My husband was in a concentration camp when it happened. Although my father-in-law and my mother-in law were with me when I was attacked, they never said anything to me. My husband never said anything to me, although I can see that now, he is jealous. It became particularly apparent now that he is retired. He started drinking, he gets drunk and speaks about it. Before that, he did not talk about it. It is difficult now. He is jealous.

Since the pandemic began there have been other challenges. I had COVID-19 and now I am afraid of getting it again. Everything is restricted, our access to health care is restricted. I have not been able to get the medical care there I need. We do not move around, we only visit a family medicine doctor to get our prescriptions. I should visit an endocrinologist, a vascular surgeon, a neuropsychiatrist, and I have not visited them since last year. Because of my diabetes, I used to go to a spa and a hyperbaric oxygen chamber, but now I cannot go there.

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TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA), BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

My name is Vesna (pseudonym), I was born in 1955 in Vareš, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On 25 November 1993, I was attacked. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Army, (the 2nd and 3rd Corps), entered the empty town of Vareš. Croats left on 2 and 3 November 1993. Immediately thereafter, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Army came. Vareš had been promised to the Bosnia and Herzegovina as war booty. The pillage, which had not been seen before, began, and the war booty was transported to Breza, Zenica and Tuzla. There were only 12 police officers accompanying the Army troops and they could not maintain order in the town. There was absolute chaos. Amid the turmoil, the military troops discovered that my mother and I had stayed. They also discovered that we were Croats. For 15 days we were under pressure. They asked us for food, and we gave it to them so long as we had it. Then they wanted to force us out of the house so that some army members could move in. I was issued a decision on compulsory labor service and I began to work.

On 25 November 1993, at around 17h, four soldiers came to our door and introduced themselves as police. The soldiers were part of II Corps from Tuzla; they were members of the Bosnia and Herzegovina army. Two of them stayed with my mother and treated her badly. They stripped her down to her waist, looking for money; they put a rifle and a knife down her throat. The other two soldiers took me to the quarry that was located approximately 300 m from house, and they raped me. They released me after a police car and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) vehicle drove along the main road and passed the quarry. They were afraid of being caught, and let me go, warning me that I could not tell anybody what they had done to me. They beat me. I had two long wounds from the rifle on my head, each wound was 1 cm wide and 1 cm long.

Despite being threatened by the perpetrators to not tell anyone, I reported the case to the police within one hour of the attack. The police came to my house and then they arrested the two men who had tortured my mother. The police saved my mother, and they took me to the hospital for a medical examination. They also revealed the names of the rapists.

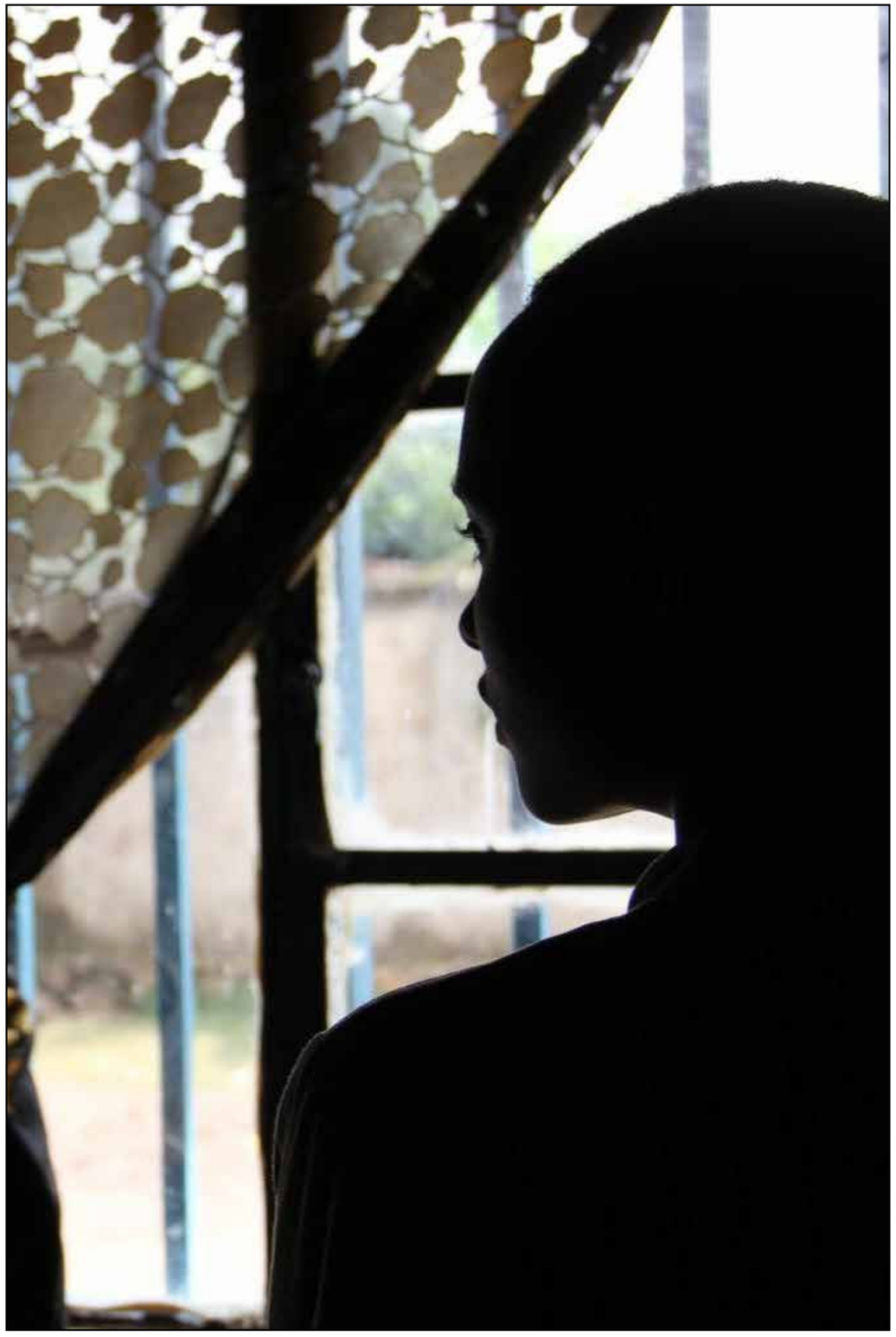
It didn't take long for word to spread about what happened to me. By the next day after the attack, the whole of Vareš knew that I had been raped. After what happened to me, my family and friends were understanding they did not put any blame on me. I was not isolated from everyone, but many women alluded to me that they know what happened to me — that I had been attacked. Immediately after I was attacked, some of the women tried to blame me, they said that I had dressed up. Some men apologized to me on behalf of other men.

During the process of obtaining justice, my experience was positive. While reporting my case I did not face any medical or judicial fees, and I was treated well. I think I was the only person who had a court judgment issued during the war. In fact, the judge visited the local command in Vareš twice to take testimonies from me and my mother. I came face-to-face with my perpetrators, all four men were arrested and transferred to Tuzla where they were prosecuted and tried. I know that two of the men have already served their sentences. My mother's torturers were held responsible for the serious crime of robbery and "my" rapists were held to account for rape. What happened to me could have been prevented, the troop rotation in an inhabited settlement could have been prevented. After what happened to me and my insistence with the mayor and the president of the executive committee, that was no longer the case. I succeeded, and so no other woman has had to go through what I went through.

In addition to receiving some support throughout the legal justice process, I was also provided psychosocial support services from various civil society organizations. The first civil society organization to do so was the NGO Media Zenica. They heard my case and came to visit me. Even though some civil society organizations were quite helpful, no state authority was interested. The Office of the then President of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alika Izetbegović, told me that what had happened to me was an ordinary crime.

COVID-19 has impacted me. Isolation due to the pandemic is difficult. I miss Sarajevo, Dubrovnik and travel; this has all gone on for too long. Since the pandemic began, I have retired, and I now receive a pension and the "civilian victim of war" benefit, so for now I have sufficient income.

UNICEF PHOTO | LeMoyne



UNICEF Photo | Eliane Luthi

BURUNDI

TESTIMONY PROVIDED BY THE MUKWEGE FOUNDATION

My name is Rose (pseudonym), I am 42, and I am from Kirundo, Burundi. The incident happened on 24/10/1993. It was during the civil war of 1993, the elected first democratic President was killed and the conflict started. People started to kill each other based on their ethnic groups. My ethnic group was accused to have killed the President. Myself and my family started to run away from our home so that we wouldn't get killed. I was caught by men in the forest where we were hiding. I did not know those men, but they accused me of killing the President, yet I did not even know who he was and why he was killed. I was raped by three men who left me to die. They were armed men affiliated with the ruling party of that time.

I did not report the incident because there was nowhere to report. I was young and scared of reprisals and stigma. I lacked trust in the police and law enforcement authorities. I was also ashamed of myself; I did not want anyone to know it. I had a lot of health complications due to that rape, so reporting was not even my priority. My priority was safety and getting medical help. The worst part is that my family was killed, and my sister got raped and died straight way; I saw everything. I did not even think about reporting anything. I changed the province and I lived where no one knew me. I did not disclose what had happened to anyone at that time. I did not access to any service because nothing was available for survivors back then. I survived alone on self-medication, and later on I ended up with serious health problems. I did not seek justice because my rape was punishment based on my ethnic group.

In peace negotiations no one mentioned rape or what happened during the war. I did not have a platform to tell my story. I never received any reparations. I believe people, state army and politicians need to be educated on not using women as weapon of war. Also, in peace negotiations, they need to document what happened during war for accountability and better future.

I'm on my healing journey. It is not easy because until today, women's bodies are still used as battlefield by the opposition party in my country. Nothing changed after 30 years. Women are raped and abused in different ways but there is still no justice. I hope that one day, we will be free and live in a world without rape and injustice. I'm calling all survivors to break the silence and speak out for the sake of our justice and a better future for our kids.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

LE TÉMOIGNAGE SUIVANT A ÉTÉ RECUEILLI PAR MME. EMILIE BÉATRICE EPAYE, DÉPUTÉE CENTRAFRICAINE

UNICEF Photo | Brian Sokol

Je suis XXX, je suis orpheline de père et de mère, et j'avais 12 ans à l'époque des faits. J'habitais avec ma tante à côté de l'aéroport Bangui M'poko. J'ai fui les combats comme tout le monde pour venir trouver refuge sur le site des déplacés abritant des milliers de personnes. Ayant perdu la trace de ma tante, je me suis retrouvée avec des amies errant parmi les déplacés. J'ai décidé de repartir à la maison à la recherche de ma tante et pour récupérer quelques affaires. C'est ainsi que j'ai été violée par un groupe de miliciens Anti-Balaka au fond de la piste de l'aéroport Bangui M'poko. Un jour, j'ai décidé d'aller vendre des rations alimentaires pour me faire un peu d'argent, j'ai été enlevée et violée par un groupe de miliciens Séléka qui rodaient autour du site. J'ai pu fuir et revenir sur le site pour me faire soigner.

J'avais très mal et mes amies m'ont accompagnée chez Médecins Sans Frontières sur le site des déplacés de l'aéroport Bangui M'poko où j'ai été prise en charge et soignée; la 2ème fois pareillement. Etant donné que je ne retrouvais pas ma tante, tout le monde connaissait mon histoire sur le site des déplacés. J'avais honte d'aborder le sujet. Je suis restée sur le site des déplacés avec mes copines jusqu'en juillet 2016 où l'ONG française Triangle-Génération Humanitaire a fait mon écoute et m'a conduite au Centre des Filles de Damala, appartenant à la Fondation Voix du Cœur où j'ai été entièrement prise en charge. Le Centre de Damala étant créé pour venir en aide aux filles victimes de violences sexuelles ainsi qu'aux filles en détresse, nous étions toutes assistées de la même manière. Au centre de Damala, j'ai eu un soutien psychosocial et j'ai suivi des formations en alphabétisation, en couture, teinture ainsi qu'en saponification.

Je n'ai pas cherché la justice puisque l'un des miliciens Anti-Balaka m'a enlevée devant le centre en 2018 pour fuir avec moi à la frontière du Cameroun, à Garoi-Mboulaye, où j'ai eu un enfant avec lui. Je l'ai quitté pour revenir à Bangui avec mon enfant. Grâce à la formation reçue à la Voix du Cœur, je continue à faire des activités génératrices de revenus. Je n'ai pas eu de dédommagements. Je n'ai pas signalé moi-même mon cas aux autorités, j'ai été prise en charge par les ONGs. Par contre, j'ai souffert avec ma grossesse et je continue à prendre en charge mon enfant, assumant toute seule les frais. Je n'étais pas informée des risques de violences sexuelles que je courrais à l'époque et je pensais que l'aéroport Bangui M'poko était sécurisé. Je ne savais pas non plus que les milices armées avaient infiltré le site des déplacés.

La pandémie de COVID-19 a changé ma vie. Je ne peux pas aller vendre mes marchandises comme je veux. Il faut porter des masques, avoir de l'argent pour acheter du savon, etc.

Disbelieve. Artwork by: Maria Joao Dolan

PÉRIODE

2003-2020

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG FEMME HOMME ACTION PLUS (FHAP)

Je suis le survivant S-FF-01 j'ai 14 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Haut Oubangui notamment à Zemio. J'ai subi et commis des cas de violences sexuelles pendant mes séjours en captivité avec la Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) en 2015.

J'ai été kidnappé par la LRA. J'ai passé un an et six mois dans la brousse. J'ai subi de violences physiques. Ils m'ont frappé pour me faire peur pour et pour que je me soumette. J'ai assisté à l'assassinat de quatre enfants, dont deux filles et deux garçons qui n'ont pas obéi aux ordres des chefs de la LRA. Ils m'ont forcé à assassiner un enfant. J'ai assisté au viol des mineurs de 9 et 10 ans par ce groupe armé. Ils m'ont obligé de les torturer et de les tabasser avant de passer à l'acte sexuel sur ces petites filles qui se lamentaient au nom de leurs mamans en pleurant au secours. C'était la 1ère fois dans ma vie de voir la nudité des rebelles qui ont l'âge de mon père et qui n'éprouvent pas de pitié quand ils pénètrent violemment les petites filles en public. Parfois ces petites filles n'arrivent plus à marcher. Certaines sont devenues boiteuses suite aux violences sexuelles en captivité avec la LRA. Les rebelles ougandaises, qui parlent la langue Athioli habillés en tenue militaire.

J'ai signalé l'incident à un membre de ma famille et à l'ONG Invisible Children le même jour de ma fuite. J'ai reçu de l'assistance de la part d'Invisible Children et de quelques membres de ma famille. Ma famille d'accueil à Bangui n'arrive pas à contrôler mon comportement qui m'éloigne des autres enfants. Je n'ai pas eu accès à aucun service ni à un soutien psychosocial ni aux services juridiques. Je n'ai jamais été en justice depuis que je suis sorti de la brousse mais je souhaiterais obtenir justice devant un tribunal pour parler de ce qui m'est arrivé et ce que j'ai vécu. Je n'ai jamais reçu d'assistance juridique et de dédommagement quelconque pour les préjudices subis. Je souhaiterai que la justice soit faite.

Ce sont mes parents qui supportent les frais de ma santé, l'alimentation, le vêtement et autres. L'Etat doit sécuriser nos frontières pour que ce genre de situation ne se reproduise plus, arrêter la guerre, informer la population sur les principales zones de risque.

Le temps est devenu plus dure qu'avant, tout est bloqué avec le COVID-19.

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Photos prise par Monsieur NDAMOYEN Georges journaliste reporteur

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG FEMME HOMME ACTION PLUS (FHAP)

Je suis la survivante S-SM-03, j'ai 46 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine (RCA) dans la région de Bas Oubangui. J'ai subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits de 2013.

J'habitais à Bangui avec mon mari défunt. Nous étions tous des petits commerçants, c'était le 13 août 2013 vers 9h du matin que nous avions décidé de nous réfugier à la mosquée Centrale. Dès notre arrivée au 5eme arrondissement nous étions arrêtés par les groupes armés Anti-Balaka.

Mon mari avait 46 ans à l'époque et j'avais 36 ans. Ils ont poignardé mon mari avec le couteau et l'ont coupé en pièce avec la machette devant moi. Après avoir tué mon mari vers 11h, ils se sont retournés contre moi en disant qu'ils n'ont jamais eu l'occasion de coucher avec une femme musulmane mais aujourd'hui ils ont la chance. Ils m'ont poignardée avec un couteau dans la cuisse, ils m'ont violée à tour de rôle. Ils étaient trois sur moi. Je me suis évanouie et je me suis réveillée à 16h.

Je marchais sur mes genoux pour aller à la Mosquée Centrale. Quelques jours plus tard mes enfants m'ont regagné à la Mosquée et quand la Mosquée a été attaquée mon fils de 8 ans a reçu une balle à la tête et il est décédé quelques temps après. L'autre a reçu une balle à la jambe.

Trois semaines plus tard je me suis rendue à la Croix Rouge à côté de la Mosquée où j'ai été dépistée. Après le bilan médical trois mois encore je ne me sentais pas bien J'ai refait une fois de plus mes examens de dépistage qui ont confirmé que j'étais séropositive, infectée par le VIH/SIDA. J'ai signalé mon cas aux femmes avec qui on dormait sur le site du centre. J'ai été reçue dans un point d'écoute sur le site de la Mosquée après avoir été déclarée séropositive au VIH/SIDA. L'accès aux soins était gratuit.

Mes bourreaux étaient les groupes armés Anti-Balaka avec les machettes en main; ils portaient les gris-gris sur eux. L'acte s'est produit au bord de la route. Suite à ce qui m'est arrivé j'ai développé un problème de santé mentale. Je faisais des cauchemars, je vivais dans mes pensées: le film macabre de l'assassinat de mon mari, celui de mes enfants et de mon état de santé après le viol. J'ai été stigmatisée par mon entourage et par ma communauté qui m'a rejeté. Je suis isolée car ils sont fatigués de m'assister.

J'ai reçu la prise en charge médicale gratuite de la Croix Rouge Centrafricaine. Je n'ai pas reçu une assistance psychologique, juridique. Depuis lors je n'ai jamais reçu une assistance humanitaire des ONG, ni du gouvernement. C'est difficile d'avoir l'accès à la justice pour une femme pauvre, victime de violence sexuelle comme moi. Je n'ai jamais reçu un dédommagement quelconque pour les préjudices subis. Tous mes soins médicaux et mes bilans étaient gratuits grâce à la Croix Rouge Centrafricaine. Si le gouvernement sécurisait les frontières, les rebelles ou les mercenaires ne pourraient pas envahir la République Centrafricaine (RCA) et causer du tort à la population civile. Ces évènements ont favorisé la violence et les abus sexuels sur les femmes considérées comme des armes de guerre pendant les conflits.

Photos prise par Monsieur NDAMOYEN Georges journaliste reporteur

J'ai tout perdu y compris ma dignité en tant que femme musulmane. Je suis infectée par le VIH/SIDA, mes enfants sont en bas âges. Je suis devenue mendiante ainsi que mes enfants afin de survivre. Nous n'avons pas de maison, ni de l'argent pour payer le loyer. Ce qui est important pour moi c'est de m'exiler dans un autre pays pour que mes enfants profitent d'une bonne l'éducation. Aujourd'hui j'ai besoin d'une assistance financière pour faire des petits commerces afin de répondre aux besoins de mes enfants. Le monde entier doit se mobiliser pour éliminer les violences sexuelles liées aux conflits, car ces violences détruisent les femmes entièrement. Dans l'avenir, je souhaite reprendre ma santé mentale, mon relèvement socioéconomique, culturelle ainsi que l'épanouissement de mes enfants.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG FEMME HOMME ACTION PLUS (FHAP)

Je suis une actrice humanitaire S-VI-04, j'ai 41 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Bas Oubangui, notamment à Bangui. Je suis une actrice chargée de la prise en charge holistique des survivantes de violences sexuelles pendant les conflits de 2013 à 2021.

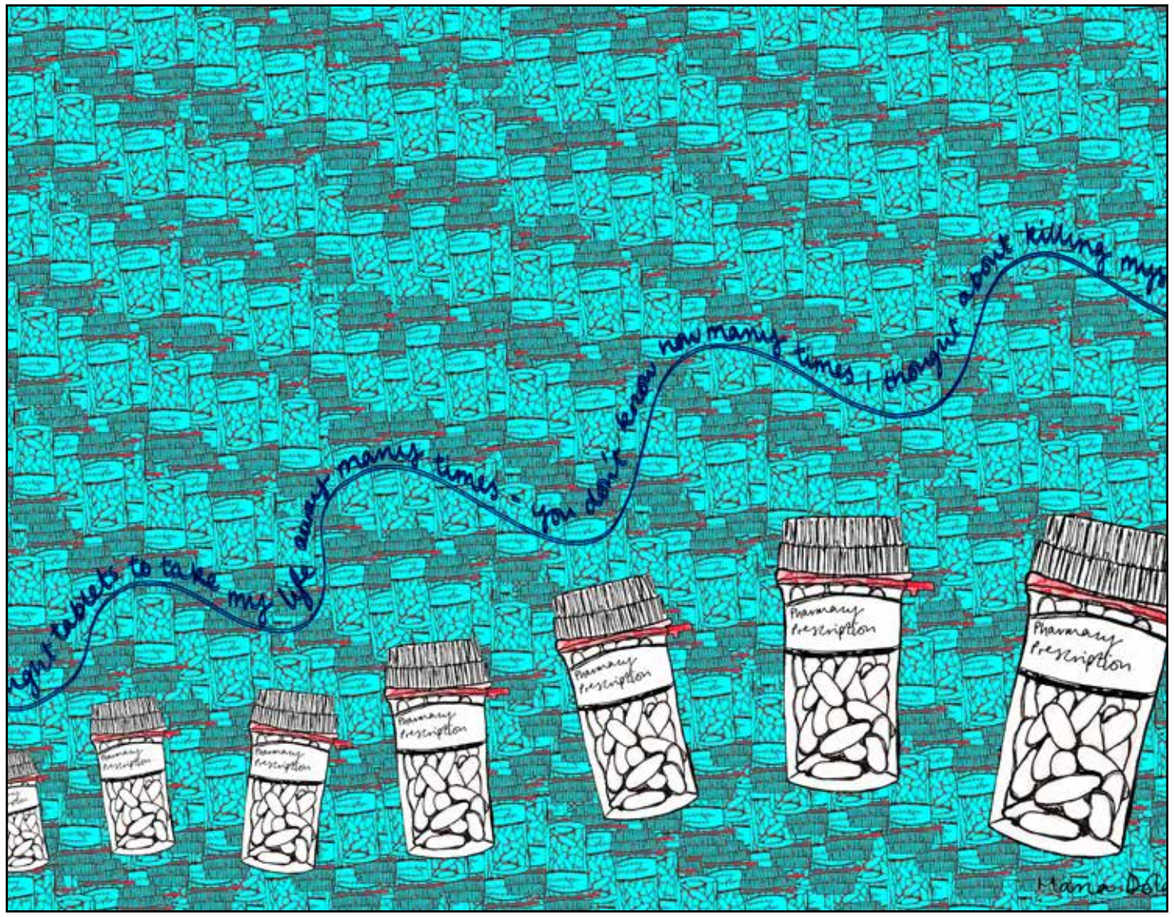
En tant qu'actrice humanitaire centrafricaine, j'ai été en contact permanent avec les femmes et les enfants dont je peux estimer leur nombre à plus de 132 survivants des captifs de la LRA. Aujourd'hui ces femmes et ces enfants se retrouvent dans les communautés sans aucun appui. Quand ces femmes et ces enfants ont regagné la communauté ils font face à des stigmatisations et à des rejets de la communauté ce qui les mettent dans une situation difficile sans avoir réparation et justice.

En 2013 quand il y a eu le renversement du pouvoir et la montée en puissance de la coalition Séléka, plusieurs femmes et filles ont été victimes de violences sexuelles pendant ce conflit. J'ai rencontré la plupart de ces femmes sur les sites des déplacés, elles sont abandonnées, sans aucune prise en charge et ni d'aucun appui psychosocial. Elles sont traumatisées même de nos jours. On sent la répercussion dans leur vie quotidienne.

Dans le sud-est de la RCA, c'est la LRA constituée des groupes armés (ougandais, tchadiens, camerounais et centrafricains). A Bangui ce sont les groupes armés et milices composés des Séléka (des soudanais, tchadiens et centrafricains) et Anti-Balaka. Pour la LRA, je n'ai pas pu saisir la justice dans les zones, du fait de manque de structure étatique. Pour la Séléka j'ai tenté d'orienter certaines femmes en justice mais cela traine encore. La plupart des victimes ne sont pas prises en charge, malgré des financements obtenus par la RCA. Les bourreaux ne sont pas poursuivis, ils se promènent librement, et cela constitue une menace pour les acteurs qui recherchent la vérité sur les cas qu'ont subi ces femmes. D'après l'expérience de la Maison Sécurisée fruit du partenariat entre la Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Centrafrique (MINUSCA) et l'ONG Nationale Femme Homme Action Plus (FHAP) dont je suis la Directrice Exécutive, j'ai pris en charge au moins 350 femmes et enfants qui ont été référencés.

Plusieurs femmes ont manifesté le sentiment de poursuivre les bourreaux et voir même l'Etat du fait de ne pas les prendre en charge après ce qu'elles ont vécu. L'Etat doit mettre en place des structures pour la prise en charge holistique, sauf MSF et les ONG qui font ce travail. Toutes les victimes réclament la justice mais elles sont limitées. J'ai pu prendre en charge certaines procédures auprès du Procureur Général mais la procédure tarde à se réaliser.

L'Etat doit sécuriser nos frontières pour que ce genre de situation ne se reproduise plus, mettre un terme à la guerre, informer la population sur les principales zones à risque. La plupart des victimes ne sont pas secourues. Il faut faire la distinction entre les victimes qui ont perdu leurs biens et celles de violences sexuelles pendant les conflits qui méritent une attention particulière afin de voler à leurs secours. Les autorités, les acteurs de la société civile et les acteurs humanitaires doivent mettre l'accent sur les victimes de violences sexuelles pendant les conflits.



Tablets. Artwork by: Maria Joao Dolan

Les Organisations Humanitaires Nationales qui travaillent sur le terrain doivent avoir des financements et des moyens afin de prendre en charge les femmes qui souffrent. Je déplore aussi le fait que les Organisations Humanitaires Internationales ont réduit leur champ d'action; pendant cette pandémie de COVID-19 cela met en difficulté les victimes de violences sexuelles pendant les conflits sur le plan de la prise en charge.

UNICEF Photo | Vlad Sokhin

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG FEMME HOMME ACTION PLUS (FHAP)

Je suis la mère de la survivante S-MA-05, j'ai 59 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Yade, notamment à Bossangoa. Ma fille a subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits en 2003. Quand les groupes rebelles tchadiens Zakawa ont pris la ville de Bossangoa, ma grande fille revenait de l'école. Dans son trajet elle a fait face aux deux hommes armés qui l'ont violée à tour de rôle. Après avoir relâché la fille après l'incident, elle est revenue à la maison et elle est tombée enceinte un mois plus tard.

Le lendemain, avec mon mari, nous étions obligés de fuir la ville afin d'éviter l'atrocité des hommes armés qui ont envahis la ville de Bossangoa. Nous sommes restés au moins un mois dans la forêt. A notre retour, notre maison a été incendiée avec tous nos biens et de surcroit j'étais enceinte. J'ai subi tous les coups sur mon enfant. Même jusqu'à présent, il ne supporte pas les hommes en tenue militaire ainsi que les détonations d'armes. Pour ma fille elle est restée à ma charge jusqu'aujourd'hui. Mais mon mari qui me soutenait dans sa prise en charge est décédé depuis deux ans.

Ma fille ne supporte pas de vivre avec sa fille et je crains la sécurité et la protection de cette petite fille quand je serais morte. C'étaient des hommes armés en tenue militaire dénommé Zakawa originaire du Tchad.

Je n'ai pas signalé le cas à la Police, par ce que les services de l'Etat ne fonctionnaient pas et aussi par crainte de représailles pour ma famille. J'ai demandé à mes enfants de ne pas parler de cela afin d'éviter la stigmatisation de la communauté. J'ai jugé mieux de ne pas informer ma fille sur sa situation par ce que quand j'ai parlé de ce qui s'est produit à l'époque avec son père elle était vraiment affectée. J'ai vécu sans soutien moral pour ma fille et l'enfant, c'est mon mari défunt qui nous soutenait. Je n'ai jamais reçu une assistance juridique ni un dédommagement quelconque pour les préjudices subis. Je souhaite que la justice soit faite. Tous les frais de prise en charge ont été supportés par moi et mon mari qui est décédé. L'Etat doit sécuriser nos frontières pour que ce genre de situation ne se reproduise plus.

Ma situation est devenue très difficile après la mort de mon mari. Ce qui est important pour moi c'est d'avoir un appui financier pour une Activité Génératrice de Revenus (AGR) afin de continuer à soutenir ma fille et son enfant qui est née du viol.

Le message que je dois passer au monde est que la femme violée est détruite totalement et nécessite une prise en charge psychologique; l'accompagnement doit être à long terme pour sa guérison. On doit aussi créer des espaces de repos pour l'écoute de ces femmes et leur apporté des solutions. J'aimerais voir des centres de réinsertion socio éducationnels et économiques pour les survivantes ainsi que la mise en place des juridictions pour juger les auteurs des violences sexuelles liées aux conflits en RCA. Le temps est devenu plus dure qu'avant, tout ne marche pas bien.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG FEMME HOMME ACTION PLUS (FHAP)

Je suis la survivante S-NC-06, j'ai 21 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Yade, notamment à Bossangoa. J'ai subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits, le 18 avril 2013 à 16h. J'ai été victime d'une violence sexuelle dans ma maison où je suis tombée enceinte et infectée.

Cinq personnes ont perpétré ce viol, deux sur ma maman et deux sur moi. Ce sont des peuhls vêtus de tenues militaires qui parlaient français et arabe; ils étaient de teints clairs. Leurs tenues étaient trop sales avec des odeurs nauséabondes.

La première personne à qui j'ai signalé le cas c'était une voisine de bonne foi, ensuite les membres proches de ma famille. L'ONG Femme Homme Action Plus (FHAP) m'a apporté quelques soutiens psychosociaux et une ONG pour les orphelins. Un an après, d'autres ONGs ont commencé à m'aider.

Nous sommes rejetées par certains de nos parents. La stigmatisation était notre quotidien dans la communauté. Nous n'avons pas signalé cette situation aux autorités parce que les Séléka (la rébellion qui a pris le pouvoir en 2013) étaient encore aux pouvoirs par crainte de représailles. Par manque de connaissance de nos droits, et faute de moyen, nous n'avons pas pu demander justice.

L'impunité qui dominait nous décourage et les procédures de justice sont longues. Nous, les victimes, on est découragé. Les problèmes de transport pour se rendre en ville où l'administration y est concentrée, les problèmes de preuves, et les traçabilités de dossiers pour toute cette tracasserie, on n'a pas assez de moyen. J'ai été l'objet de stigmatisation, d'insulte et de violence verbale de la part de mon entourage et je suis traitée différemment. Je ressens le rejet de quelques membres de ma famille ainsi de quelques personnes dans la communauté.

Je n'ai pas eu accès aux services juridiques ni à d'autres services de la part du Gouvernement. Quand j'ai vécu la situation, au début je ne savais vers qui me tourner pour obtenir justice devant un tribunal et je n'ai pas obtenu justice ni un quelconque dédommagement pour ce préjudice subi. Les tentatives de procédures judiciaires n'ont jamais abouti. Une partie des frais de santé a été supportée par moi-même et l'autre par les ONGs, notamment pour obtenir un certificat médical que j'ai perdu. Je n'ai pas payé de frais de justice pour manque de moyen.

Pour prévenir les violences sexuelles que nous avons subies, le Gouvernement doit garantir la sécurité de la population aux frontières et à l'intérieur du pays en obtenant des informations précises sur les principales zones de risque, les localités où sévissent les groupes armés et le risque de violence sexuelle. La mise en place des check points dans les zones à risque, des patrouilles mixtes de police et de la gendarmerie (pédestres et motorisés); des meilleures infrastructures avec éclairage; des points d'eau dans les villages; et enfin encourager la résolution des conflits de manière pacifique. Pour ma situation, démunie et venant d'une famille pauvre le plus important pour moi aujourd'hui est la prise en charge alimentaire en tant que rescapée et la justice. En tant que survivante le relèvement socio-économique est aussi très important pour que je devienne autonome.

Photo UNICEF | Brian Sokol

Le message que je souhaite partager avec le monde est ainsi: la violence liée au conflit détruit la vie d'une femme. « Je n'ai plus de vie ». Les femmes doivent être protégées contre les violences sexuelles liées aux conflits en Centrafrique. Devenir une femme porte-parole des autres femmes victimes ou femmes en détresses, en situation difficile pour apaiser leurs souffrances. Les conséquences de la pandémie et des restrictions qu'y sont liées sur ma vie est le manque de moyen pour acheter les kits d'hygiènes et respecter les mesures barrières. Les ONG qui donnent des appuis ont fermé leurs portes faute de financement pour les situations humanitaires en raison du COVID-19. Il y a une longue queue d'attente dans les hôpitaux pour une personne infectée par le Coronavirus et une carence des médicaments de VIH/SIDA. La lenteur de la justice n'est pas faite pour arranger les choses. Quant à continuer de travailler pour gagner ma vie, les perspectives manquent.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG FEMME HOMME ACTION PLUS (FHAP)

Photo UN MINUSCA | Leonel Grothe

Je suis la survivante S-MH-07, j'ai 47 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Bas Oubangui, à Bangui. J'ai subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits en décembre 2013. Après 25 ans de mariage avec mon mari, mon mari a décidé de prendre une 2ème femme parce que je n'arrivais pas à lui donner un enfant. Quelques années plus tard, on a divorcé et j'ai regagné ma famille. C'est dans cette condition que j'ai connu ma voisine du quartier qui vivait avec son mari et leurs deux filles au champ au fin fond de la piste de l'aéroport M'poko. Pendant l'attaque des groupes armés en 2014, le mari de ma voisine a été assassiné au champ par ces derniers qui ont violé ma voisine à côté du corps de son mari allongé au sol. Elle est tombée enceinte et elle a donné naissance à un garçon qui a aujourd'hui huit ans. Comme ma voisine n'a pas supporté l'assassinat de son mari, le viol, et l'enfant issu du viol, elle a fait une dépression. J'étais obligée, en tant que femme qui n'a jamais eu d'enfant, à m'occuper d'elle, qui est dans un état dépressif, et de ses enfants. Car elle a été abandonnée par sa famille, maintenant c'est moi qui veille sur eux.

C'étaient les groupes armés Séléka vêtus en tenue militaire. Ils parlaient la langue peuhl et musulman. Son cas n'a jamais été signalé ou rapporté. J'étais obligé de faire ce que je pouvais avec mes moyens de bord. C'est pour la 1ère fois qu'une ONG a pu documenter son cas. Je remercie l'ONG FHAP. Sa famille l'a rejetée, les membres de la communauté l'ont sous-estimé et méprisée suite à son état dépressif ce qui l'a poussé à être seule. On n'a jamais eu accès aux services médicaux, psychosociaux, et juridiques. Je me bats seul avec ma voisine survivante et jamais on a obtenu justice. Je souhaite que justice soit faite devant un tribunal pour elle. On n'a jamais été à l'hôpital. Je me bats à seule pour m'occuper des enfants et de ma voisine pour la nourriture ainsi que les soins. Je souhaite qu'on mette en place un système de sécurité solide en faveur des femmes et des enfants. Les enfants et leur maman ont besoin d'être pris en charge dans un centre socio-éducationnel, sanitaire et surtout la maman a besoin d'une prise en charge psychosociale à long terme pour qu'elle soit guérie. Je souhaite aussi travailler dans un centre de prise en charge pour apporter ma contribution du fait des expériences que j'ai eu aux cotés de ma voisine.

Avant cette pandémie de COVID-19 tout allait bien mais maintenant la conséquence que j'ai eu est la fermeture des portes des ONGs.

Je suis la survivante S-ZS-08, j'ai 52 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Bas Oubangui, à Bangui. Le matin du 5 mai 2018, j'ai subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits. J'étais à la maison avec ma fille, on regardait les groupes armés qui sillonnaient le quartier en quête d'un voleur du nom XXX. Subitement ils ont décidé de se diriger vers ma maison accusant mon fils dénommé XXX âgé de 30 ans qui est mécanicien. Ils ont ramené mon fils dans leur base dénommée « Commissariat de Tampis », ils l'ont torturé et ils lui ont ligoté les mains et les pieds en l'air. Bizarrement quand ils appelaient sur le téléphone volé, le voleur répondait toujours au nom de XXX qu'ils cherchaient. Mais ils ont refusé d'accepter l'innocence de mon fils.

J'ai supplié en me mettant à genou devant les rebelles pour prouver l'innocence de mon fils en vain, j'étais obligé d'aller voir le plaignant des objets perdu et je l'ai supplié d'aller libérer mon fils qui n'est pas XXX. Dès qu'on est arrivé à la base des rebelles, ils ont expliqué à la plaignante qu'elle les a payés pour torturer et tuer l'auteur du vol. Elle a insisté que mon fils n'était pas l'auteur mais ils ne nous ont pas écouté. J'étais obligé de revenir à la maison et laisser mon fils dans les mains de Dieu, surtout parce que c'était la période de carême (Ramadan). Peu après ils ont relâché mon fils. J'ai conseillé mon fils de pardonner l'acte qui s'est produit. Subitement l'un des assaillants est venu égorger mon fils devant moi avec un couteau tranchant et il a utilisé l'eau dans ma maison pour laver son couteau. Mon mari lui a demandé de le tuer en même temps que son fils, mais l'assaillant est reparti dans leur base. Nous avons couru dans tous les sens pour sauver notre fils. Malheureusement une fois arrivés à l'hôpital il était mort. J'ai décidé d'aller dans leur base pour qu'ils me tuent aussi comme ils ont tué mon fils. Malheureusement pour moi j'ai vu l'assassin de mon fils gradé et vêtu avec une arme de guerre en main. Je pense qu'ils l'ont récompensé. Quand il a fixé le regard sur moi, il a dit quelque chose aux autres qui ont l'âge de mon dernier fils (20 à 22 ans). Aussitôt ils se sont mis en queue l'eue dans la clôture au moins 6 personnes (jeunes hommes).

Un m'a violé en premier lieu et il a ordonné aux autres jeunes hommes de me violer à tour de rôle, jusqu'à ce que je m'évanouisse par terre. Quand je me suis réveillée, je me suis revêtue; mes habits étaient complètement mouillés de leur sperme. Quand je suis sortie de leur base, un peuhl m'a aidé en me transportant sur sa moto et m'a ramené à la maison. J'ai juste constaté que mon fils était déjà enterré. Je n'ai pas vu le corps de mon fils. Le lendemain j'ai relaté les faits à ma sœur qui m'a emmenée à l'hôpital pour des bilans médicaux.

Juste un mois après, mon dernier fils âgé de 25 ans a reçu une balle perdue à la maison et a succombé par la suite. Il s'appelle XXX. Mes deux garçons qui sont morts suite à l'insécurité étaient les piliers de ma famille. Ils soutenaient la scolarité de leurs petits frères et la location de notre maison. C'étaient les groupes armés dont la base s'appelait « Commissariat de Tampis » dans le 3ème arrondissement de Bangui. Le chef rebelle s'appelait XXX. Mais l'assassin de mon fils, le bourreau qui a ordonné aux autres six jeunes hommes de me violer à tour de rôle, s'appelle XXX.

J'ai signalé le cas à ma famille qui m'a beaucoup soutenu. J'ai reçu des conseils et des séances d'écoute dans un centre dans la Mosquée centrale. Un jour une dame blanche est venue dans le centre pour me rencontrer en personne puis elle m'a orientée à l'UMIRR et à la MINUSCA afin de procéder à mon évacuation et celle de ma famille dans un autre pays pour ma protection. Malheureusement toutes ces tentatives demeurent aujourd'hui sans réponse, me laissant toujours entourée de mes bourreaux et de l'insécurité totale. J'ai reçu des soins gratuits grâce aux ONGs de la santé, surtout MSF.

J'ai été accompagnée avec des conseils psychologiques et orientée par FHAP, les ONGs de Droits de l'Homme (OCDH) et aussi par la MINUSCA et l'UMIRR. J'ai perdu ma dignité en tant que femme dans ma communauté musulmane. J'ai été traité d'impur par mes amies et voisines. Mes bourreaux me menacent et menacent ma fille à la maison. Je ne supporte plus de vivre ensemble avec mon mari à cause de ce qui m'est arrivée. J'ai beaucoup de frustrations en plus de ma situation difficile pour avoir la justice et l'apaisement de mes douleurs.

Un exemple: le 28/12/2020 la division de protection de la MINUSCA m'a envoyé au Cameroun, précisément à Maiganga, dans le centre de réfugiés de l'Agence des Nations Unies pour les Réfugiés (HCR). J'ai passé au moins un mois sur le site avec mes cinq enfants Après, je suis rentrée à Bangui où vivent encore mes bourreaux. Je crains pour ma sécurité. Aujourd'hui personne ne me vient en aide, je me soigne quand je tombe malade, je n'ai aucune activité pour ma prise en charge. J'ai développé des maladies comme: l'hypertension, le traumatisme etc. Aujourd'hui personne ne me vient en aide, je me soigne quand je tombe malade. Je n'ai aucune activité pour ma prise en charge. J'ai développé des maladies comme l'hypertension, le traumatisme etc. Le Gouvernement a l'obligation de sécuriser la population civile et de désarmer les groupes armés. Il doit construire beaucoup de prisons et punir les auteurs des crimes de guerre, tels que les violences sexuelles liées aux conflits, qui sont restés impunis en RCA.

Je vis difficilement à cause de ma dignité perdue. Ce qui est important pour moi c'est de quitter ce pays pour un autre afin d'oublier mes chocs pour que je sois apaisée. Le message que je voulais partager avec le monde est que les Etats doivent tout faire pour éliminer les violences sexuelles liées aux conflits en reconnaissant les douleurs des femmes survivantes par des appuis en termes de dédommagement et de poursuite judiciaire des bourreaux. J'espère reconstruire ma vie dans l'avenir et devenir une femme leader défenseuse des survivantes de violences sexuelles liées aux conflits.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG FEMME HOMME ACTION PLUS (FHAP)

Je suis la mère de la défunte victime S-HE-09 de violence sexuelle liée au conflit avec un enfant né de viol âgé de 8 ans en ma charge de grand-mère. J'ai 63 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Bas Oubangui à Bangui. C'était le 27/12/2013 à 17h quand les rebelles ont envahi la ville de Bangui. J'ai fui avec ma famille sur le site des déplacés à l'aéroport tandis que ma fille défunte a décidé d'aller rester chez son petit ami. Alors que l'insécurité était devenue plus sérieuse et l'ami de ma fille a décidé de joindre un groupe d'auto-défense pour garantir sa sécurité contre l'assassinat généralisé, il a été tué par les assaillants. Par la suite, ma fille a décidé de s'enfuir pour me joindre sur le site des déplacés vers l'aéroport M'poko. C'est ainsi qu'elle a été brutalisée par les groupes armés qui ont tué son ami. Ils l'ont violée à tour de rôle et l'ont emmenée dans leur base et l'ont violée encore à tour de rôle avant que leur chef a décidé de la prendre comme femme. Elle a passé trois mois en captivité dans la main des groupes armés. Il s'agissait des milices armées non étatique. Ils étaient musulmans parce qu'ils parlaient arabe; d'autres portaient des uniformes, d'autres étaient en civils.

Un jour vers 16h ces groupes armés sont partis pour se battre quelque part c'était ainsi que ma fille a eu l'opportunité de fuir et me joindre sur le site des déplacés déjà enceinte. Je ne pouvais pas accepter qu'elle fasse de l'avortement clandestin raison pour laquelle elle a gardé la grossesse et elle a accouché un enfant de sexe masculin. J'ai soutenu ma fille par la prière. Elle n'a jamais été quelque part pour signaler son cas. Malheureusement suite à un accident qui s'est produit le 19/11/2020, j'ai passé un mois à l'hôpital avec ma fille. Elle est décédée le 30/01/2021 laissant à ma charge l'enfant issue de violence sexuelle.

Quand j'étais sur le site des déplacés, j'ai reçu l'appui financier de l'Organisation Internationale pour la Migration (OIM) d'un montant de 90.000 Franc CFA, de la part du Ministre de l'Action Humanitaire Mme MBAÏKOUA Virginie avant de quitter le site. Je n'ai jamais été à la justice mais je souhaite obtenir justice devant un tribunal. J'ai eu à prendre en charge les frais médicaux et l'OIM m'a soutenu. Les mesures à prendre pour éviter les violences sexuelles que je souhaite sont des patrouilles de police pour garantir la sécurité; mais aussi il faut renforcer la sécurité des frontières. Ce qui est important pour moi aujourd'hui, c'est la réussite de mon petit fils qui est orphelin de mère et qui ne connait pas son père: le bien-être de cet enfant née de viol ; la création d'Activités Génératrice de Revenu (AGR) qui vont me permettre de faire la prise en charge de l'enfant. J'ai été victime de violences sexuelles avant cette pandémie de COVID-19. La conséquence était néfaste. Trouver de quoi manger était difficile car personne ne me soutenait et d'autant plus que je n'ai pas AGR.

Photo/IFP Productions

Je suis la survivante S-SY-10, j'ai 22 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Bas Oubangui à Bangui. J'ai subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits, en juin 2014 à 15h. L'incident s'est produit quand je fuyais les milices Anti-Balaka pour rentrer chez moi. Je ne savais pas que les rebelles étaient cachés sur la colline qui surplombe le quartier Vodambala. Finalement je me suis retrouvée face à face avec un chef rebelle Anti-Balaka à un endroit où il n'y avait personne, c'est là qu'il m'a attrapée par la force et il a couché avec moi. Arrivée à la maison, j'ai rapporté l'incident à ma mère et le lendemain matin elle m'a emmenée à l'hôpital pour les examens médicaux relatifs à cette violence sexuelle. Quelques jours après je suis repartie encore avec ma maman à l'hôpital pour les autres examens. Trois semaines plus tard, les résultats de ces examens ont révélé que je suis enceinte et positive au VIH/SIDA. L'auteur appartient à un groupe de milices armées Anti-Balaka identifié par la communauté sous le nom de Y. R. Il portait des vêtements civils avec des gris-gris sur lui et il tenait une machette.

Le lendemain j'ai signalé l'incident à mon chef de quartier et une semaine après à l'ONG FHAP. J'ai vécu un soulagement parce que j'ai été bien traitée, avec dignité et respect par l'ONG FHAP. Ma famille ne m'a jamais abandonnée, elle était toujours à mes côtés. Quant aux membres de ma communauté, ils ne m'ont pas apporté leur soutien. Je n'ai pas voulu me plaindre à la justice par peur de représailles de mon bourreau qui me suivait chez moi, à la maison, et me prenait par la force devant mes parents, en proférant des menaces de mort. A mon encontre, j'étais devenue son esclave sexuelle. C'est ainsi qu'il m'a encore enceinté pour la seconde fois. Au regard de ces abus sexuels accompagnés des traumatismes récurrents, mon organisme n'a pas pu supporter les traitements antiviraux du VIH/SIDA que je prenais. J'étais découragée après l'accouchement de procéder au dépistage du second bébé qui a aujourd'hui trois ans.

Si je n'avais pas signalé cet incident je n'aurais pas été prise en charge et l'incident ne sera non plus connu par ma communauté, même si cette communauté continue à me stigmatiser aujourd'hui. Je n'ai pas voulu informer la police et la gendarmerie parce que je ne fais pas confiance à ces forces. Je n'ai pas déposé plainte par crainte de mon bourreau mais aussi pour éviter la stigmatisation de ma communauté. Mes parents n'ont pas payé le coût des services et des transports pour aller en ville à cette époque parce qu'ils n'avaient pas d'argent. Après ce qui m'est arrivé j'ai eu le sentiment que mes amis et la communauté m'avaient rejetée. J'étais toujours isolée et marginalisée, personne ne me portait attention comme auparavant. J'ai eu accès rapidement à l'hôpital où j'ai reçu les premiers soins. Ensuite j'ai été placée sous antirétroviraux (ARV) jusqu'à l'accouchement de mon bébé né séronégatif grâce au soutien psychosocial de mon médecin. Je n'ai pas eu accès aux services juridiques et à d'autres services. Personne ne m'a fourni ses services ni le Gouvernement ni une agence de l'Organisation des Nations Unies.

C'était difficile pour moi d'entamer une telle démarche. Je souhaite de tous mes vœux obtenir justice et réparations pour moi et la prise en charge de mes enfants devant un tribunal, car je n'ai pas encore obtenu justice ni un dédommagement quelconque pour le préjudice subis. Je n'ai pas pu prendre en charge les frais ou toute autre dépense pour signaler mon cas aux autorités, y compris auprès des autorités judiciaires par manque de moyens financiers. Par contre ma famille a payé mes frais médicaux ce qui m'a permis d'être examinée et d'obtenir un certificat médical sauf les frais de justice par manque d'argent.

Pour prévenir les violences sexuelles que j'ai subies le gouvernement aurait pu prendre de meilleures mesures de sécurité en donnant des plus amples informations en temps réel sur les principales zones à risque (les forêts, les collines, les zones isolées, signaler la présence des groupes armés, organiser des patrouilles mixtes Police, Forces armées centrafricaines/FACA), assurer un bon éclairage public à la communauté, installer des points de contrôle, protéger par tous les moyens la population, plus précisément les femmes et les enfants, aménager des points d'eau dans les villages à risque et favoriser un libre accès de la communauté aux fourneaux.

Ma situation actuelle est désespérée. Ce qui est important pour moi aujourd'hui et qui puisse vraiment m'apaiser c'est de bénéficier d'une formation vocationnelle en vue d'assurer mon autonomisation en tant que rescapée, car j'ai abandonné l'école en classe de 4e à cause de cette situation. Mon père, qui me soutenait, s'est retiré au village, du coup je me suis retrouvée toute seule devant les problèmes de prise en charge de mes enfants et de ma santé. Mon corps développe beaucoup d'allergies. Avec le traitement de antirétroviraux (ARV), je suis obligée de prendre des médicaments, de la pharmacopée pour atténuer les symptômes de ce fléau tout en craignant pour ma vie.

Le message que je souhaite partager avec le monde c'est de « lancer un appel pressant à tous les dirigeants de la planète de venir au secours des victimes des violences sexuelles, de leur créer des meilleures conditions de vie en mettant à leur disposition des maisons sécurisées, de leur apporter un appui psychologique, sanitaire, alimentaire, éducationnel et vestimentaire ». Mon seul espoir pour l'avenir est de me rendre utile et autonome et d'avoir un minimum de confort dont j'ai besoin. La restriction des visites familiales et les mesures barrières du au COVID-19 ont impacté négativement sur ma vie qui est déjà très fragile. Tout est bloqué. Je suis incapable de signaler mon incident et d'accéder aux services ou de chercher à obtenir gain de cause auprès de la justice et de poursuivre mes Activités Génératrices de Revenus (AGR) afin de gagner ma vie.

Photo APTOPIX | Jerome Delay

Je suis la mère de la victime S-FR-12. J'ai 58 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Haut Oubangui, à Alindao. Ma fille a subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits en 2016. Je suis une fermière, et je passe habituellement une semaine à un mois dans ma ferme pour les activités agricoles avant de revenir à la maison. Un jour je me suis rendue au campement pour une semaine. C'est en ce moment qu'un milicien Anti-Balaka est venu trouver ma fille qui était toute seule à la maison. Il l'a brutalisé avant de la violer et s'est enfui par la suite. A mon retour une semaine après l'incident ma fille m'a expliqué les faits qu'elle a subis pendant mon absence. Aussitôt j'ai décidé de l'emmener à l'hôpital mais ma fille s'était opposée catégoriquement à cause de la violence sexuelle qu'elle a eu et par crainte d'être stigmatisée.

Selon ma fille, l'auteur faisait partie des groupes de milices armés Anti-Balaka non étatiques. Il portait sur lui des vêtements civils et les gris-gris avec une machette à la main. Il était très violent et sans pitié. Pour sa protection, ma fille n'a pas signalé l'incident à qui de droit, ni à la police, ni à une ONG, ni aux prestataires de services par crainte de représailles, de stigmatisation, par manque de confiance à la police et à la gendarmerie. Elle n'a même pas pensé au tribunal qui est très éloigné de notre quartier. On n'avait pas d'argent pour payer les honoraires des avocats. Ma fille était bien traitée par la famille, car personne n'était au courant de ce qui s'est passé sauf moi. Elle n'a jamais eu accès aux services médicaux ni aux soins de santé sexuelle, ni un soutien psychosocial, ni à des services juridiques et ni à d'autres services parce qu'elle s'était catégoriquement refusée d'y aller. Le Gouvernement, une ONG ou une agence de l'Organisation des Nations Unies ne m'ont pas fourni leurs services.

Ce n'est qu'après un mois que ma fille s'est rendue compte qu'elle était enceinte. Vu sa situation, j'ai décidé de geler tous mes travaux agricoles et de rester à ses côtés jusqu'à la naissance de son enfant de sexe masculin. C'est en ce moment, que j'ai emmené ma fille à l'hôpital pour des examens. Quelques jours après les résultats de ces examens ont révélé qu'elle était testée positive au VIH/SIDA. Ensuite elle a commencé à développer de symptômes de traumatisme aigu.

C'était difficile pour elle de faire la quête de justice. Mais, comme moi, elle souhaitait ardemment obtenir justice devant un tribunal, car elle n'a jamais obtenu justice ni un quelconque dédommagement pour le préjudice subi. Même si ma fille n'est plus en vie je m'en chargerai. Par manque de moyen financier, je n'ai pas pu prendre en charge les frais ou les autres dépenses pour signaler son cas aux autorités, y compris auprès des autorités judiciaires, il en est de même pour ses frais médicaux, son certificat médical et ses frais de justice. Les mesures qui auraient pu être prises pour prévenir les violences sexuelles qu'elle a subies c'est de veiller sur les femmes et les filles pour leur sécurité dans les zones à risque. Malheureusement ma fille est décédée en janvier 2021 suite au VIH/SIDA, me laissant avec mon petit-fils infecté à sa naissance.

En tant que cultivatrice très âgée et à la suite de ce qui s'est passé à ma fille, chaque fois que je pense à sa disparition tragique je commence à développer de l'hypertension. J'ai besoin d'une assistance en Activités Génératrices de Revenus (AGR) pour la prise en charge de mon petit-fils infecté par sa maman à sa naissance. La restriction des visites familiales et les mesures barrières dû au COVID-19 ont impacté négativement ma vie. Je n'ai pas pu avoir accès aux services ni chercher à obtenir gain de cause auprès de la justice ni à faire des AGR pour subvenir à mes besoins.

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Je suis la mère adoptive de la survivante S-CO-13. J'ai 65 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Haut Oubangui, à Bangassous. Ma fille a subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits en 2015. Elle était une vendeuse des produits vivriers et elle se rendait très souvent à Sibut dans la Kemo pour acheter ses produits pour les revendre à ses clients à Bangui. Un jour au cours du trajet Bangui-Sibut des groupes armés non identifiés ont arrêté leur véhicule. Ils ont pris toutes les femmes qui étaient à bord en otage. C'est ainsi qu'ils ont emmené ma fille avec eux dans leur base en pleine forêt et l'ont contraint à accepter comme mari l'un des rebelles. Celui-ci la droguait tous les jours pour qu'elle soit capable de supporter ses abus sexuels. Ma fille a passé au moins quatre mois dans la forêt avec les groupes armés cherchant en vain l'opportunité de fuir jusqu'à ce qu'elle est tombée enceinte. C'est en ce moment qu'elle est parvenue à tromper la vigilance de son bourreau pour s'échapper avec une grossesse de cinq mois jusqu'à Bangui.

Bien que malade et dans un état dépressif, elle m'a informée de tout ce qu'elle a enduré. Le lendemain je l'ai emmené à l'hôpital immédiatement où j'ai supporté tous ses frais médicaux et sa prise en charge jusqu'à l'accouchement de son bébé.

L'auteur appartenait aux groupes armés non étatiques. Il était vêtu d'une tenue militaire et parlait arabe et peuhl. Alors que ma fille a pu me signaler de l'incident, elle ne l'a pas toute suite fait à la police ni à une ONG ou aux prestataires de services. Elle a signalé l'incident cinq mois après à son arrivée à Bangui. Le fait de rapporter ce qu'elle a subi l'a soulagé, l'a mis en confiance et lui a permis de se soigner et d'être traitée avec respect et de bénéficier du soutien sans relâche de la famille. Si elle n'avait pas signalé l'incident à la police ni à une ONG ou aux prestataires de services, c'était par crainte de représailles, de stigmatisation et par manque de confiance dans la police. Traumatisée, elle n'a pas eu l'idée de déposer plainte même s'il fallait le faire. Avec quels moyens financiers, elle devait payer les coûts des différents services et les frais de justice. Ma fille a été traitée différemment, elle a été isolée et marginalisée par ses amis et la communauté qui ont su ce qui lui est arrivée car elle n'a pas identifié l'auteur de sa grossesse. Seule sa famille était constamment à ses

côtés. J'ai emmené ma fille à l'hôpital immédiatement où j'ai supporté tous ses frais médicaux et sa prise en charge jusqu'à l'accouchement du bébé. Elle n'a reçu aucun soutien psychosocial, ni un accès à des services juridiques et à d'autres services. Le gouvernement, l'ONG ou une agence de l'organisation des Nations Unies ne lui ont pas fourni leurs services.

Traumatisée et affaiblie par son état de santé dépressif, en tant que sa mère j'étais préoccupée de son état de santé. Je n'avais aucune idée sur une démarche de quête de justice ni le temps matériel de faire autre chose que de surveiller l'évolution de sa santé. Mais ma fille a toujours souhaité obtenir justice devant un tribunal tôt ou tard car elle n'a pas obtenu justice ni un quelconque dédommagement pour le préjudice subi. Je n'ai pas pris en charge des frais ou toute autre dépense pour signaler son cas aux autorités, y compris auprès des autorités judiciaires. Mais j'ai payé ses frais médicaux notamment l'examen prénatal jusqu'à son accouchement. Par contre, les frais de justice n'ont pas été payés par manque d'argent.

Le gouvernement devrait tout mettre en œuvre pour rétablir la paix et la sécurité dans les zones à risque, assurer la libre circulation et protéger sans faille les femmes commerçantes dénommées les chercher à manger ou les vendeuses des produits de tout genre œuvrant dans les zones à risque, en vue de subvenir aux besoins de leur famille et de ravitailler la population centrafricaine en denrées alimentaires.

Malheureusement ma fille n'a pas survécu son état de santé dépressif, elle ne s'est guère améliorée, et elle est décédée en 2019. Son bébé a rendu l'âme lui aussi deux ans après, en janvier 2021, des suites de maladie.

Je suis la mère de la survivante S-PH-14,j'ai 48 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Ferti. En 2018 ma fille a subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits. En 2018 notre quartier était bouclé par les rebelles de la Séléka qui tiraient des coups de feu dans tous les sens ils ont tué notre voisin. Pendant que les armes crépitaient, ma fille XXX était en train de se soulager dans la douche à l'extérieure de la maison. Pendant ce temps nous étions tous cachés à l'intérieur de la maison sous le lit. Nous l'avons entendu hurler quelque temps, puis ce fut le silence total. On a pensé qu'elle avait été tuée par les rebelles, alors qu'elle subissait un viol collectif de plus de dix rebelles. Après leur départ, je suis sortie en courant pour aller voir ce qui est arrivé à ma fille dans la douche. A ma grande surprise, elle était dans un état d'inconscience notoire. Aussitôt je l'ai conduit à l'hôpital pour les soins d'urgence. Un mois après elle est tombée malade. Je l'ai encore ramené à l'hôpital où après un examen les résultats ont confirmé qu'elle était tombée enceinte suite aux violences sexuelles qu'elle a subies. Les auteurs étaient les éléments des groupes armés non conventionnels de la Séléka. Ils portaient des tenues militaires et parlaient l'arabe et le peuhl. Avec mon mari nous avons décidé de ne pas rapporter l'incident à la police et à la gendarmerie par crainte de représailles parce que les rebelles contrôlaient toute la ville nous avons seulement emmené la fille à l'hôpital. Depuis 2018 jusqu'aujourd'hui ma fille ne cesse d'être l'objet de stigmatisation, de rejet de marginalisation et d'injure de la part de ses amis et de la communauté. Elle a eu accès à l'hôpital où elle a reçu rapidement des soins médicaux gratuits. En revanche, elle n'a pas bénéficié d'un soutien psychologique, ni des services juridiques, et ni d'autres services. Aucun gouvernement, ni une ONG, ni une agence de l'Organisation des Nations Unies m'a fourni son service.

Je n'ai pas organisé une quête de justice, ce n'était pas faisable. Personne ne pouvait m'aider dans ce sens. Mais je souhaite obtenir justice devant le tribunal. Ma fille n'a pas obtenu justice ni un quelconque dédommagement pour le préjudice subi. Par manque de moyen financier je n'ai pas pris en charge des frais ou tout autre dépense pour signaler son cas aux autorités y compris auprès des autorités judiciaires. Il en est de même pour les frais médicaux et les frais de justice.

Le Gouvernement devrait prendre des mesures fortes pour sécuriser les femmes et les enfants dans les zones reculées et les zones à risque, signaler par tous les moyens à la population la présence nuisible des groupes armés et autres milices armés, organiser des patrouilles de dissuasion. La situation de ma fille aujourd'hui est inquiétante. Ce qui est important pour elle aujourd'hui c'est de bénéficier d'une formation vocationnelle pour une autonomisation en tant que rescapée et pour à l'aise.

Le message à partager avec le monde entier c'est de « ne pas oublier ou de laisser pour compte les victimes ou les survivants des violences sexuelles et de punir avec les dernières rigueurs les auteurs de ces actes ignobles».

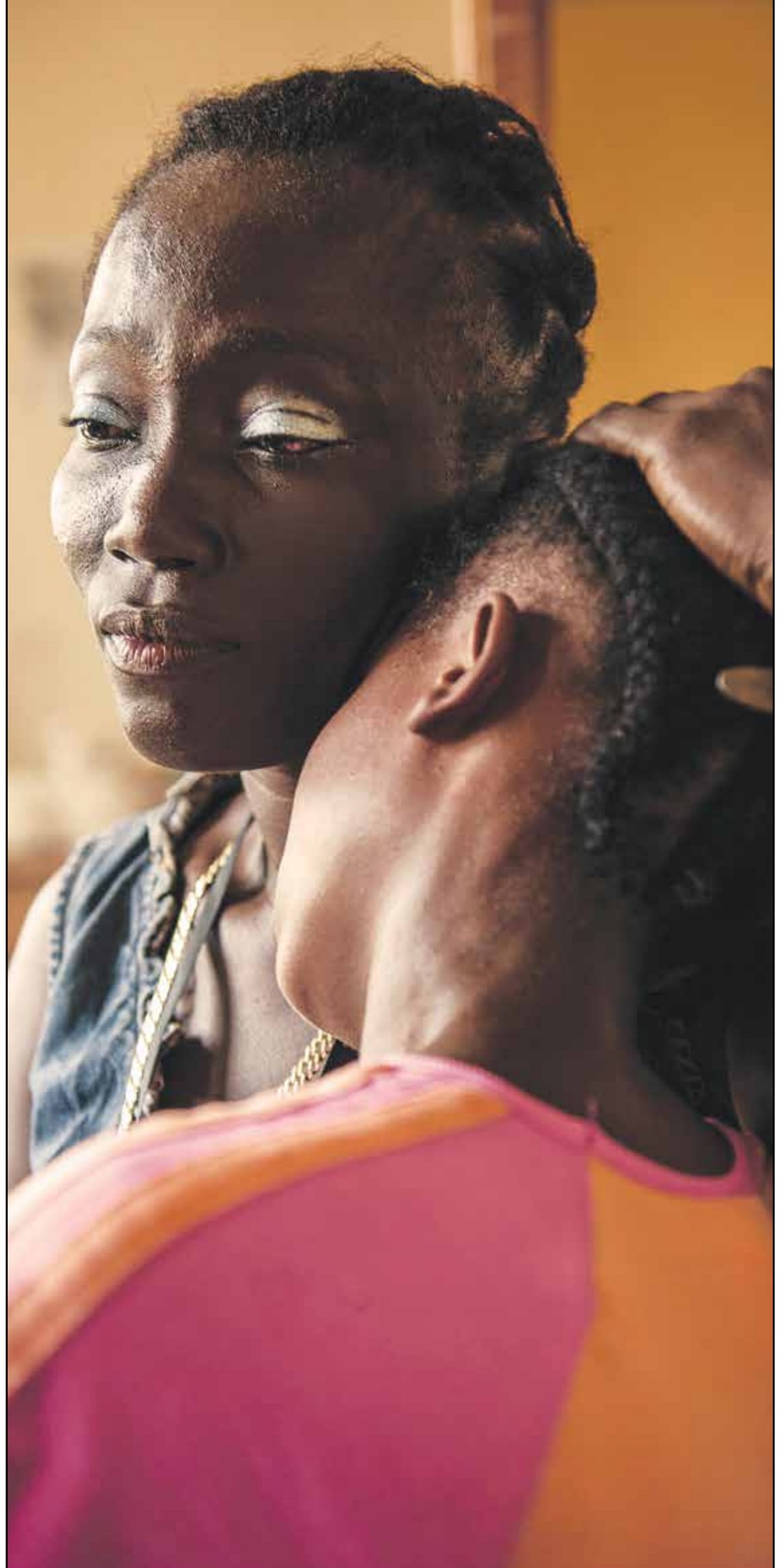
Je suis la survivante S-NI-15, j'ai 31 ans, je vis en République Centrafricaine dans la région de Kagas, à Bambari. J'ai subi un cas de violence sexuelle pendant les conflits en 2012 à 18h. Je suis commerçante, j'ai l'habitude de voyager pour vendre des articles de beauté à Bambari. Un jour alors que je me rendais dans cette localité pour la vente de mes produits notre véhicule était intercepté par les éléments des groupes armés de la Séléka entre Bambari et Grimari. Ils ont pris en otage les cinq femmes qui étaient à bord du véhicule dont je faisais partie et les ont emmenés dans leur base en pleine brousse. Ils nous ont violés toute la nuit et parmi nous une a trouvé la mort suite à une crise cardiaque, ne pouvant pas supporter ce qui lui est arrivé. Les groupes armés ont brûlé son corps pour ne pas laisser de trace. J'ai passé plus de deux semaines avec eux, je leur préparais le thé mélangé à la drogue, de la nourriture, je faisais tout pour eux puisque j'étais devenue par la force la femme de l'un d'entre eux. Un jour ils ont décidé de quitter leur base pour partir ailleurs. Leur chef a donné l'ordre que je sois libérée. J'ai marché, marché pendant plusieurs jours dans la forêt et par hasard j'ai débouché dans une plantation où j'ai rencontré un fermier qui m'a accompagné pour me montrer la sortie jusqu'à la grande route. C'est ainsi que j'ai réussi à prendre un véhicule qui m'a emmené à Bangui. Les auteurs sont les éléments appartenant aux groupes armés de la Séléka non étatiques, ils portaient des tenues militaires.

J'ai pu signaler l'incident trois semaines après à ma grande sœur et à ma mère. Le fait de rapporter les faits que j'ai subis m'a mis en confiance et m'a libéré l'esprit d'un poids que je traînais derrière moi. Après l'incident ma mère m'a fait voyager au Congo Brazzaville pour éviter la stigmatisation. A Brazzaville, personne ne connait mon histoire si bien que je n'ai pas été stigmatisée malgré que j'ai rapporté ce qui m'est arrivé aux parents du Congo Brazzaville. Je n'ai pas eu accès à aucun service, c'est ma grande sœur qui m'a emmené à l'hôpital où j'ai suivi mes consultations prénatales jusqu'à mon accouchement. Je n'étais pas en mesure de mener des démarches pour une quête de justice, pour faute d'argent. Cependant je souhaite fort bien obtenir justice devant un tribunal car je n'ai pas obtenu justice, ni un quelconque dédommagement pour le préjudice subis.

Je n'ai pas pu prendre en charge des frais ou toute autre dépense pour signaler mon cas aux autorités, y compris auprès des autorités judiciaires. C'est ma grande sœur qui a payé mes frais médicaux pour la consultation prénatale jusqu'à l'accouchement de mon bébé. Mais elle n'a pas payé les frais de justice par manque de moyens financiers.

Le Gouvernement devrait renforcer la sécurité de nos frontières pour garantir la paix et la libre circulation pour les femmes et les jeunes femmes commerçantes œuvrant surtout dans les zones rurales reculées à risque. Je suis traumatisée après ce qui m'est arrivé. Jusqu'aujourd'hui je n'ai plus envie de me marier ni d'accepter de vivre avec un homme. Ce qui est important pour moi aujourd'hui c'est de reprendre mes activités commerciales, scolariser ma fille née du viol et qui ne connais pas son père. Le message que je souhaite partager avec le monde c'est de « mettre un terme à la guerre, mais prioriser le dialogue et la paix dans le monde entier et plus singulièrement en Afrique et surtout en Centrafrique, mon pays ».

Les conséquences de la pandémie COVID-19 et des restrictions qui y sont liées sur ma vie sont relatives à l'accès aux services.



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COLOMBIA

TESTIMONIOS CONSEGUIDOS A TRAVÉS DE LA FUNDACIÓN MUKWEGE

Soy Fulvia, una mujer de 54 años y vivo en Popayán Cauca, Colombia. Fui víctima de violencia sexual en casa en junio del año 1990 a las 9 de la mañana. Los perpetradores fueron tres integrantes del grupo armado de las guerrillas de las FARC, de los cuales uno me violó. 24 años después decidí denunciar a mi violador que era un integrante del octavo frente de la guerrilla de las FARC. Cuando me decidí denunciar me dijeron que "para que denunciaba si había pasado mucho tiempo, que además no tenía las pruebas". Yo les dije que tenía el historial clínico para que me creyeran, pero lo hice llorando, pues no tenía conocimiento de mis derechos aún. Mi familia no supo cuando denuncié, solo supieron las otras mujeres que lo hicieron conmigo. Muchas amigas y amigos se alejaron de mí. Yo tenía un buen restaurante y cuando me vieron hablando de lo que me pasó se fue el 80 % de los clientes, lo que acabó con mi trabajo. En mi familia también al principio les incomodaba, después aceptaron y ahora me apoyan. Tuve atención de salud por una enfermedad de transmisión sexual, y porque estaba embarazada, en el hospital San José de Popayán. No pagué ya que en ese tiempo estaba afiliada a la atención en salud. Pero no tuve atención en mi salud reproductiva ni psicológica. No había ONGs porque no di a saber lo que me estaba pasando. Todavía no se ha hecho justicia, solo hemos sido apoyadas por ONGs de cooperación internacional para el tema de ayuda psicosocial, hemos asistido a talleres de superación emocional, de reconocimiento de las leyes. Algunas nos dedicamos a estudiar para lograr el bachillerato, otras una carrera, hemos participado en espacios importantes tanto en el ámbito nacional como internacional. En ese tiempo vivíamos en el campo donde no teníamos servicios públicos. Además, quien gobernaba era la guerrilla de las FARC así que no se les podía exigir porque a toda hora amenazaban a las personas y asimismo mataban todos los días. No había policía ni ningún grupo armado legal, y si llegaba era por corto tiempo y se mataban entre ellos dejando a gente campesina muerta en el camino, reclutamiento. Debido a eso nos tocó salir del lugar dejando casa, finca, animales, todas las pertenencias, llegando desplazadas a la ciudad de Popayán.

Mi situación hoy es diferente, aprendí a vivir en una ciudad, a trabajar, pero sobre todo a romper el silencio con dignidad. Hoy sé que no tuve la culpa de lo que me pasó. He venido trabajando en mí, siempre apoyada y apoyando a otras mujeres porque muchas hemos logrado sanar, perdonar y transmitir un mensaje a las que están en el camino aun sin poder hablar. Hoy ponemos nuestros nombres y contamos lo que nos pasó al mundo entero. Ya que al seguir escondidas o sin nombrar la violencia sexual esta se sigue perpetuando. Basta de callar. Lo que no se dice ni se escribe ni se publica simplemente no existe. Nuestra meta y esperanza es ayudar a erradicar la violencia sexual de los conflictos armados y los lugares protectores. Ahora soy mejor persona, más amorosa, mejor madre, hermana, hija y compañera. Ha mejorado mi autoestima, porque decidí aprender para desaprender honrada de ser activista local, nacional e internacional con la red global SEMA. Sabemos que no existe un borrador para borrar el pasado, pero sí un lápiz para escribir el presente y proyectarnos al futuro.

La pandemia COVID-19 no la esperábamos, esta congeló proyectos, procesos y se cerraron muchas oportunidades. En mi caso estoy agradecida porque gracias a los procesos de empoderamiento logré apoyar a mi familia y a otras personas desde la virtualidad para que no se violara a las mujeres, ni a ningún ser humano. Personalmente tuve COVID-19, fue muy duro, en algún momento sentía que ya no daba más y me rendía. Fue un largo mes, estuve muy enferma, gracias a Dios me recuperé. En la pandemia me dediqué a estudiar, a escuchar audio libros, a participar en foros, y conferencias virtuales. Las pocas denuncias se han logrado acompañar desde lo virtual. Para el sustento económico, sí, ha sido duro porque cerraron locales donde trabajábamos. Ahora estoy en la casa, al cuidado de mis nietas, estudiando apoyada por mi hija, y trabajando lo social con la organización Tamboreras del Cauca y la Alianza Territorial de Mujeres (ALIATE).

Soy Nancy, tengo 58 años, soy de la región de los Llanos Orientales, en Colombia. La primera violación a raíz del conflicto armado pasó el 6 de enero 1987 en la playa pública de San Bernardo del Viento, región del Caribe Colombiano por mano de un grupo armado paramilitar al margen de la ley. La segunda violación fue el Sábado Santo de 1997 en la cocina de la casa donde aún vivo, en el municipio de Guamal Meta, Llanos Orientales. Eran hombres vestidos de negro, de las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) y estaban armados. Por miedo, durante muchos años no denuncié las dos violaciones.

Solamente en el año 2015 logré instaurar las dos denuncias en una jornada colectiva de denuncia y declaración, llevada a cabo por el Ministerio de Justicia del gobierno nacional y la Asociación el Meta con Mirada de Mujer, de la cual hago parte. La Asociación el Meta con Mirada de Mujer nos preparó durante tres fines de semana a través de actividades lúdicas, ejercicios de escritura donde elaboré un cuento cantando lo que me había ocurrido en las dos violaciones perpetradas por los paramilitares colombianos. La Asociación el Meta con Mirada de Mujer buscó los recursos y nos pagó el hotel, el transporte y la alimentación durante los tres fines de semana de preparación para la audiencia; cubrió también todos los gastos en el día que fui a

denunciar. La única atención que he recibido fue a través de la Asociación el Meta con Mirada de Mujer que me dio apoyo psicológico y acompañamiento cuando me atreví a denunciar. Durante estos 34 años de silencio no hablé del tema: eso era solo mío, tenía mucho miedo de lo que podría pasar si denunciaba, ya que los actores armados seguían en la zona. Me siento estigmatizada. Yo creo que el estigma lo creo yo misma conmigo

misma, ya que tardé 34 años antes de denunciar la primera violación y esperé 24 años para denunciar la segunda violación.

En diciembre de 2014, fui elegida como representante de las mujeres víctimas de violencia sexual. Obtuve esta representación tras una votación importante, la logré por el trabajo que he venido haciendo de prevención de la violencia sexual, con mujeres, niñas y niños en la región donde vivo, los Llanos Orientales colombianos. Esto ha permitido hacer denuncias públicas, derechos de petición, seguimiento a los 126 casos de denuncias que ha realizado la Asociación el Meta con Mirada de Mujer. Entre otras acciones, sin mayor éxito para la garantía de derechos de las víctimas, el gobierno y los operadores de justicia colombianos no responden.

Nunca he recibido ningún apoyo económico o psicológico o para mi salud por parte de las autoridades. Toda la ayuda que he recibo es por los lazos construidos con las mujeres de mi región: con ellas lloré, reí, y seguimos llorando y seguimos riéndonos. Entre risas y llantos, hemos ido sanándonos. Nos dimos la oportunidad de reconocernos en nuestros dolores. Nos permitimos hablar y romper el silencio entre nosotras mismas. Esto nos ha permitido conocer otras mujeres, otras historias, dando la posibilidad de reconstruir nuestras vidas, a través de talleres lúdicos sanadores con otras ONG, de resaltar a la red SEMA que me permitió ver la salud de otra manera relacionándola con mi propio cuerpo, aprendiendo técnicas para reconciliarme con el mundo y conmigo misma por supuesto, además de poder conocer las realidades de mujeres de otro continente lejano para mí, pero cercano por los dolores, mujeres que me reconfortan. Agradezco a la vida por el regalo que me ha dado de ver otras realidades y aprender de ellas.

Todo lo que he logrado para mi sanación ha sido gracias a la Asociación el Meta con Mirada de Mujer y otras ONGs como la Red de Mujeres Víctimas y Profesionales que me dieron la oportunidad de replicar todo lo que aprendí con la organización el Meta con Mirada de Mujer y así pude ayudar a otras mujeres víctimas de violencia sexual. Esto me permitió ganar mayor confianza y sentirme mucho más segura de mis conocimientos reconociéndome en mis propios miedos. Para lograr la prevención de dichos actos de violencia sexual, hacen falta mayores garantías por parte del gobierno nacional y el gobierno local en zona del conflicto armado, donde los grupos al margen de la ley tienen el control territorial. Hoy sigo viviendo en el mismo lugar, en la misma casa, aun continúo siendo vocera nacional de la ley 1719 donde se reconoce la violencia sexual dentro y fuera del conflicto armado. Sigo haciendo seguimiento de los 126 casos de violencia sexual que se instauraran por la Asociación el Meta con Mirada de Mujer. Además, estoy asesorando a la alcaldía del municipio de Guamal para el reconocimiento de los derechos de las mujeres de Guamal, frente a la salud, la educación y la economía. También, presto servicios de apoyo para fortalecer y ampliar la mesa municipal de mujeres, como escenario de interlocución entre las mujeres en toda su diversidad con la institucionalidad. Mi esperanza es lograr un empoderamiento efectivo de las mujeres logrando cambios estructurales tanto en el gobierno local como nacional, donde se vea reflejada la garantía de derechos para la población víctima del conflicto armado. En otras palabras, garantizar por lo menos la salud de las mujeres víctimas de violencia sexual.

Fui víctima de violencia sexual antes de la pandemia. En este año de confinamiento, he tenido la posibilidad de poder seguir las actividades sociales por medio del uso del internet y participar en actividades de seguimiento de las violencias de género. Se logró realizar una audiencia pública del comité descentralizado de la ley 1257 por la cual se dictan normas de sensibilización, prevención sanción de formas de violencia y discriminación contra las mujeres. Su resultado fue la firma de un pacto firmado por las diferentes autoridades de la región como gobernador, alcaldes operadores de justicia, y las diferentes organizaciones de mujeres en el cual las autoridades y los mandatarios se comprometen a realizar prevención y atención a las mujeres víctimas de violencias de género. Las organizaciones de mujeres le harán seguimiento a este pacto. Esto se logró por la gestión mía como vocera nacional, ya que la región dobla la tasa nacional en violencias, ocupa los primeros lugares en violencia sexual, feminicidios y violencia intrafamiliar.

La pandemia COVID-19 me ha permitido seguir ejerciendo mi trabajo como lideresa donde he podido desarrollar otras habilidades que no creí que tenía. Por ejemplo, lograr hacer reuniones virtuales con las mujeres y las autoridades, para que entre todas y todos se discutieran situaciones reales de agresión, de violencias, ya que por el confinamiento la violencia intrafamiliar aumentó de una manera significativa. Con herramientas de comunicación, tuve la posibilidad de hacer programas radiales para la prevención y activar rutas de atención en casos de personas violentadas. Otro impacto fue el de poder reflexionar frente a mí, poder pensar realmente en mí, en mi familia, y sobre todo en las mujeres más cercanas. Gracias a esta reflexión estoy más serena para afianzar mi proyecto de vida aquí en este lugar, donde decidí vivir hace 35 años. También me ha permitido estar más atenta a los problemas cercanos, donde sé que he podido lograr acciones efectivas frente a las violencias, como escribir y adaptar un protocolo de atención para las mujeres víctimas de violencias de género. Considero que se están haciendo acciones para la concientización de los y los operadores de justicia, pero falta mucho para lograr cambios donde las mujeres dejen de ser agredidas en una cultura patriarcal, donde estas violencias realmente disminuyan, se erradiquen, donde se logre paso a paso cambiar de una cultura machista, donde los relevos generacionales realmente sean más conscientes, más humanos.

En mi vida, estoy tomando decisiones, lo cual nunca creí que pudiera hacer. La pandemia y el confinamiento me permiten ver la realidad de otra manera, pensar en mi como Nancy, una mujer que había dejado de reír, que me escapaba de mi propia realidad, que siempre pensaba en las y los otros. Ahora pienso más en mí, en resolver mis conflictos personales, emocionales conmigo misma, en seguir soñando, en hacer de mi finca, mi casa más que un refugio de animales. En hacer que esta reserva de

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árboles, de protección de especies, también sea mi protección, mi seguridad, avanzando en mi propio reconocimiento como persona, donde reír me sea natural. Estoy enfrentando mis propios miedos.

He tenido la posibilidad de reflexionar frente a mí accionar político en la región, logrando cambio de extraiga para mayor efectividad de las acciones, como:

- El 25 de junio del año 2020 se realizó una audiencia pública del comité descentralizado de la ley 1257 del 2008 (ley de la no discriminación de las mujeres víctimas de la violencia de género) en el departamento del Meta, Llanos Orientales. Esta audiencia fue solicitada por mí como vocera nacional de la ley 1719 del 2014 sobre la violencia sexual. Como resultado se firmó un pacto con el gobierno departamental y los operadores de justicia, para garantizar los derechos de las mujeres que han sido víctimas de violencias. Junto con otras dos mujeres estoy desarrollando una veeduría para el cumplimiento

- Logré hacer programas radiales educativos de conocimiento de derechos y programas para la prevención de violencia en la pandemia.

- Logré la construcción de un protocolo de atención, con la ruta de atención para personas víctimas de violencias en el municipio donde vivo, Guamal Meta.

- Logré conformar una mesa de mujeres para la incidencia política y el seguimiento al plan de desarrollo 2020-2023 "Guamal tierra de progreso, tierra de todos."

Mi sustento económico es el trabajo de mi finca y la asesoría en la alcancía donde doy a conocer a los funcionarios públicos y mandatarios la importancia que deben invertir en las mujeres, a través de programas y proyectos con perspectiva de género. Paralelo a esto, se formó una mesa de mujeres donde se tiene la posibilidad de hacer propuestas y hacer seguimiento a estas acciones.

Reconociendo que, si se invierte en una mujer, se está interviniendo en una familia en una comunidad, en la sociedad. Invertir en las mujeres es tener la posibilidad que haya cambios generacionales efectivos para una VIDA LIBRE DE VIOLENCIAS, cuy resultados se verán en unos 25 años...

TESTIMONIO ANÓNIMO

Soy XXX y tengo 35 años. La primera violación fue en junio de 2000 en la noche por parte de integrantes de la guerrilla de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). Yo tenía entonces 16 años y con mi amiga de colegio fuimos de vacaciones a visitar a su padre que vivía en una zona rural del departamento del Meta, región que estaba bajo control de la guerrilla. Desde que llegamos al municipio, un jefe guerrillero buscó establecer contacto conmigo. La primera noche fuimos con mi amiga y su papá a la única discoteca del pueblo. Allí el jefe guerrillero me invitó a bailar dos veces y, como yo me negué, me insultó y me reclamó: "¿es que no te gustan los negros? Eres racista". Me obligó a bailar con él. Al día siguiente, lo volvimos a encontrar. Nos ofreció comida y nuevamente me negué. Pero ese día debíamos cruzar el río y lo hicimos cinco minutos más tarde de la hora impuesta por la guerrilla. Cuando llegamos a la orilla, yo, mi amiga y su papá fuimos retenidos por dos guerrilleros que nos reclamaron el hecho de cruzar después de la hora impuesta. El jefe nos recordó que: "estos incumplimientos se pagan". A mí me llevaron a una orilla del río y a mi amiga a la otra. Fuimos violadas. El jefe guerrillero me insultó mientras me violaba y me dijo: "racista, a los hombres se les respeta". Ninguna de las dos todavía habíamos iniciado nuestra vida sexual. Nos encontramos en el camino de regreso. No hablamos sobre lo que habíamos vivido y mi amiga se suicidó a los tres meses de la violación.

El segundo ataque sexual fue el 12 de diciembre de 2004, de día, en el municipio de Granada, en la cancha de fútbol de la escuela del municipio. Fui víctima de tres paramilitares que ejercían control en la zona. Les solicité permiso para ir a visitar a mi familia que vivía en una zona controlada por la guerrilla. A mi regreso un paramilitar me informó que debía ir a la escuela. Todo el mundo sabía que las personas eran llevadas a la escuela cuando iban a ser castigadas, pero yo no había hecho nada. En la escuela, el jefe paramilitar me acusó de llevar información a la guerrilla a pesar de que le recordé que, con su permiso, había ido a esa región a ver a mi mamá. Me insultaron, me exigieron decir la verdad y luego me llevaron a la cancha de fútbol. Por varias horas los tres me torturaron, me golpearon y me violaron varias veces, de múltiples maneras y penetrándome por todas las partes de mi cuerpo, incluso usaron las armas como instrumento de violación. Me repitieron constantemente que la intención era de matarme: "Vamos a matar a esta perra". Me desmayé varias veces y en algún momento yo ya no sentía nada. En la noche me desperté y busqué ayuda, pero nadie me ayudó. Me decían: "Quien sabe que hizo usted para que le hicieran todo eso". El conductor de un camión me auxilió en la madrugada y me llevó a otro pueblo donde el sacerdote me cuidó por una semana. Cuando fui violada por los paramilitares no tuve acceso a atención médica. Me cuidó un sacerdote y me curó con tratamientos tradicionales. Posteriormente tuve un aborto espontaneo (no sabía que había quedado embarazada) y cuando me atendieron descubrieron que tenía dos enfermedades de transmisión sexual. Fui atendida por el personal de salud, aunque nunca se preocuparon por saber cómo las había adquirido. No fue una atención especializada. Luego, como resultado de tres intentos de suicidio, estuve en un hospital psiquiátrico por casi un año; pero allí solo me medicaron y nunca supieron de las violaciones. Fui tratada por depresión profunda. No hablaba con nadie de lo que le había sucedido, ni siquiera con los médicos.

La primera vez fui violada por un jefe guerrillero de la zona a quien todo el mundo conocía. La segunda vez fui violada por el jefe paramilitar de la zona y dos de sus subalternos. También eran conocidos en la zona. Tanto guerrilleros como paramilitares usaban uniformes militares y tenían los distintivos de sus organizaciones.

Diez años después decidí denunciar porque había un modelo de justicia transicional para la desmovilización de los paramilitares (Justicia y Paz). Hice una nueva denuncia por solicitud de la Fiscalía sobre la violación del jefe guerrillero 19 años después. Mi experiencia de denuncia fue desagradable porque en ninguna de las dos ocasiones hubo privacidad. En la última denuncia la funcionaria parecía no ponerme cuidado, frecuentemente me decía: "Me repite por favor". Ella estaba solo revisando su teléfono celular. No hubo trato digno, ni respetuoso porque en el mismo espacio había muchas personas. La forma en que reaccionaban las funcionarias no fue la mejor. Cuando les contaba lo que había vivido decían: "Ay no, pobrecita. Usted es tan guapa. ¿Le hicieron todo eso?". No tuve apoyo de nadie, yo sola busqué denunciar y fui sola a hacerlo. Me demoré en denunciar porque no tenía información de cómo hacerlo y, sobre todo, tenía miedo de hacerlo. Yo sabía que los perpetradores eran lo más importante en ese modelo de justicia transicional. Ellos eran el centro y no las víctimas. Me daba miedo que ellos siguieran teniendo control y de sus relaciones con las instituciones.

OSRSG Photo

He sido estigmatizada por la fuerza pública y por otras víctimas, hombres y mujeres, que ven mi liderazgo como competencia porque yo como víctima trabajo mucho para incluir la violencia sexual en la agenda del movimiento de víctimas y en las políticas públicas.

No he obtenido justicia en el Tribunal de Justicia y Paz. Los paramilitares que me violaron no declararon este delito y la Fiscalía no investigó. Estoy pendiente de mi caso en la Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, pero en este tribunal aún no se ha abierto el macro caso de violencia sexual. Recibí la reparación por vía administrativa que recibieron las víctimas reconocidas en la Ley 1448 de víctimas (una compensación económica estándar). Los daños en mi salud física, emocional, sexual y reproductiva no han sido reparados. He asumido todos los gastos para denunciar (desplazamientos, fotocopias, etc.) y también todos los gastos de salud (sobre todo los medicamentos).

Para prevenir la violencia sexual en los conflictos armados es importante que los actores armados se comprometan a erradicar este delito de sus prácticas; que las entidades no se desentiendan de este delito porque pareciera que es menos grave que otros delitos que ocurren en la guerra; y que las instituciones y comunidades no sigan estigmatizando a las víctimas, haciéndolas sentir culpables de la violación, como si fuera un castigo válido. Nada justifica las violaciones porque estos ataques dejan impactos y consecuencias aún desconocidos. Hay que cambiar la mentalidad de que "todo es válido en la guerra y en el amor".

El COVID-19 ha limitado mi capacidad económica y esto restringe mis posibilidades de continuar con mi liderazgo de apoyo a otras víctimas de violencia sexual. Ahora estamos concentradas en conseguir recursos para que las víctimas puedan recibir ayuda humanitaria porque la mayoría de ellas son mujeres que viven en condiciones de pobreza. Además, como una de las medidas es el confinamiento en las casas, la mayoría de las víctimas están silenciadas porque no pueden hablar de sus violaciones, impactos, consecuencias, etc. por teléfono, y menos a través de las redes sociales, porque todos los integrantes de las familias están permanentemente en las casas. El COVID-19 no solo ha hecho más pobres a las víctimas de violencia sexual, sino que, además, las ha vuelto a condenar al silencio, incluso a quienes ya lo habían roto.

TESTIMONIO DE ANGELA MARÍA ESCOBAR, COORDINADORA NACIONAL DE LA RED DE MUJERES VÍCTIMAS Y PROFESIONALES, COLOMBIA

Mi nombre es Ángela María Escobar, tengo 55 años y soy una mujer colombiana. En la madrugada del 26 de septiembre del año 2000, fui víctima de violencia sexual en Guatapé, un municipio turístico en Antioquia. En la noche del 25 de septiembre yo estaba en la discoteca del pueblo celebrando que un amigo habia ganado un concurso. Salimos a las dos de la mañana y nos fuimos varias personas a seguir celebrando en un sitio al aire libre cerca de la discoteca. De pronto llegaron varios paramilitares al sitio, yo me asusté mucho y después de una hora le dije a un amigo que me llevara para mi casa.

Era ya el día 26 cuando llegué a mi casa, y como era mi costumbre, estaba tomando un baño cuando de repente tocaron a la puerta. Recuerdo que me puse un pijama blanco con flores rosadas y abrí la puerta; era el comandante de los paramilitares que venía con otros dos paramilitares. Entraron y se sentaron en la sala y empezaron a consumir licor, me obligaron a servirles el licor. De repente el comandante, al que llamaban "Rafael", me agarró del brazo y empezó a empujarme hacia la habitación, yo le pedía "así no, no me maltrate". En la habitación me violó. Los otros dos paramilitares que estaban sentados en la puerta de la habitación también me violaron (eran conocidos como Carepa y el enano). Cuando salieron de mi casa, fui a bañarme de nuevo porque pensaba que me iba a quitar toda la "suciedad" que ellos me habían dejado. Dejé que el agua corriera por mi cuerpo y que se mezclara con la sangre que me salía. Me asusté porque no paraba y entonces me di cuenta de que la sangre que salía era de un labio vaginal, por un mordisco con el que me mutilaron los genitales. Los tres paramilitares que me violaron llegaron al pueblo como integrantes de las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia-AUC. Conocí al jefe paramilitar ("Rafael") en enero del 2000 porque en una ocasión me pidió que le ayudara a "conquistar" a una amiga mía, yo le respondí espontáneamente: "¿Usted no es tan hombre y tan guapo? ¡Conquístela usted!". Nunca pensé que por mi trabajo con la comunidad y por esta respuesta, mi vida fuera a cambiar. Los paramilitares nunca estaban uniformados, por el contrario, se vestían con ropa de marca (ropa costosa), siempre estaban armados e imponían horarios para las reuniones sociales y fiestas. Ellos imponían todas las reglas y quien no las cumpliera era castigado, lo que casi siempre significaba ser asesinado.

Por eso no me atreví a denunciar. Además, no denuncié porque los paramilitares me amenazaron con matar a mi familia si lo hacía. Llevaba diez años viviendo como desplazada en la ciudad de Medellín, con mucha rabia y frustración así que tomé la decisión de denunciar. La funcionaria de la fiscalía que me atendió me hizo sentir mal con las preguntas que me hizo: "¿Cuánto tiempo se demoró cada uno de los paramilitares violándola?", "¿Usted tenía las uñas pintadas cuando la violaron?". Hasta ahora no sé qué ha pasado con mi denuncia. Seguí con mi frustración, tratando de sobrevivir y entonces conocí en la Defensoría del Pueblo un proyecto de ayuda psicosocial para mujeres víctimas de violencia sexual en el conflicto armado; participé en el proyecto en el que me encontré con 30 mujeres que también habían sido víctimas de violencia sexual. Al escuchar sus historias sobre la mala atención cuando buscan justicia, me llené de motivos para aprender sobre nuestros derechos y entendí que las víctimas tenemos derecho a una reparación integral; a luchar para eliminar la estigmatización contra nosotras por parte de la sociedad, de la institucionalidad y de las familias; a que nos crean, a que no nos hagan sentir culpables de la violación y de las otras violencias que sufrimos. Aprendí que no es justo que las víctimas de violencia sexual tengamos que demostrar que no fuimos culpables de las violaciones. Aunque hemos logrado avances, no hemos obtenido justicia. Ahora tenemos la expectativa de que la Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (JEP) abrirá el macro caso nacional de violencia sexual.

Angela Maria Escobar

Cuando fui víctima de violencia sexual me sentí avergonzada. Después de las violaciones me quedé un mes encerrada en mi casa. No hablaba casi con nadie, no permitía que ninguna persona me visitara. El 25 de octubre del mismo año fui con una amiga a la plaza del pueblo. Allí se me acercaron cuatro paramilitares y su comandante, que no era el mismo que me había violado, me puso un arma en la cabeza y me amenazó con matarme, me insultó todo el tiempo y al final me dijo que me daba hasta la una de la tarde del siguiente día para que me fuera del pueblo. Yo me fui a mi casa muy asustada. Me comuniqué con mi padre y le pedí ayuda. Al día siguiente él fue con mi hijo, que tenía 16 años a recogerme. Salimos con mi padre, y mi hijo se quedó en la casa esperando otro carro para llevar las cosas. Cuando llegamos a la casa de mi papá, mi hijo le llamó y le dijo que cuando salimos habían llegado a mi casa el comandante con otros cuatro paramilitares, buscándome para matarme. Veinte días después me reuní con mi hijo en Medellín. Él me contó que los paramilitares le dijeron que me iban a matar porque "Rafael, Carepa y el enano me habían violado y la orden era matarme para que no denunciara". Ese día me mataron en vida y por mucho tiempo me pregunté: por qué le tuvieron que contar esto a mi hijo. A partir de ese día viví solo tiempos difíciles. Tuve dos intentos de suicidio, no tenía apoyo de mi familia porque no creían que me habían violado, y también porque por ser violada me había convertido en objetivo militar para los paramilitares. Viví 10 años como desplazada en Medellín, tuve que buscar comida en la basura, dormir muchas veces en la calle, robar y, por último, para sobrevivir me tocó ejercer la prostitución ya que no conseguí otro empleo. En todo este tiempo, no tuve atención médica de ningún tipo. Solo cuando ingresé al hospital por emergencia para ser operada de una úlcera gástrica tuve atención en salud, pero nunca los médicos me preguntaron por las posibles causas de esta úlcera. Solo recibí atención psicosocial cuando empecé a participar en los programas de la Defensoría. Eran actividades psicosociales colectivas que nos servían para tramitar y compartir nuestros problemas, y nuestras emociones. Ahora, con mi liderazgo, he tenido apoyo de profesionales, pero debo decir que, aunque sé que necesito reparar mi cuerpo, y atender los impactos emocionales que persisten, siempre pospongo hacerlo porque prefiero que se atiendan primero a otras víctimas que llegan en muy malas condiciones de salud física y emocional, y que nos piden apoyo. No tenemos programas especializados para atención a las víctimas de violencia sexual, y lograr una cita en medicina general es muy difícil para nosotras, y en psicología es imposible.

Mi primera experiencia con la justicia fue de humillación y eso me indignó, pero también me motivó para participar en procesos con otras víctimas y buscar justicia. Hago parte de la organización que creó el modelo de jornadas colectivas de denuncia, a través de las cuales más de mil víctimas de violencia sexual han podido denunciar las violaciones en un ambiente seguro, amable y con buen trato por parte de los funcionarios de la Fiscalía. Además, en estas jornadas las víctimas aprenden a conocer cómo funciona el sistema legal en nuestro país y cuales son nuestros derechos. De parte del gobierno recibí una compensación económica que, para mí, no fue una reparación porque el gobierno no aceptó ninguna responsabilidad por lo que me pasó, no capturó ni sancionó a los responsables. Como en esa época yo me sentía culpable, entregué el dinero a mi familia pensando que así los reparaba por lo que ellos habían tenido que vivir, no porque hubieran asumido gastos conmigo sino por la vergüenza. Tampoco yo tuve que invertir para acceder a la justicia o para atención en salud porque mi caso en la Fiscalía está congelado.

A partir de mi experiencia, y del apoyo que damos a otras víctimas, estoy convencida de que para prevenir la violencia sexual en la guerra colombiana hubiera sido importante que los paramilitares no tuvieran tanta tolerancia de los gobiernos y de las instituciones para "gobernar" imponiéndose con sus armas. En todas las regiones del país donde los paramilitares se imponían, todo el mundo sabía quiénes eran ellos, donde vivían, que hacían y nunca los persiguieron, nunca los castigaron. Se envió el mensaje de que la violencia sexual en el conflicto armado no era grave, a diferencia de lo que sucede con la guerrilla. Siempre el gobierno ha mostrado que los únicos que violaban eran los guerrilleros. Eliminar la alianza de los grupos paramilitares con la fuerza pública hubiera sido una forma efectiva de prevenir ya que por esta alianza las víctimas no confiamos en la fuerza pública.

Phones. Artwork by Maria Joao Dolan

Las víctimas de violencia sexual, como seguimos sin resolver las consecuencias de este delito en nuestras vidas, tenemos más limitaciones para vivir con el COVID-19. Esta pandemia ha limitado nuestra capacidad como organización porque la ayuda humanitaria es ahora la prioridad, y esto dificulta las posibilidades de continuar con nuestro liderazgo y apoyo a otras víctimas de violencia sexual para que accedan a la justicia y a la atención en salud. Lo más frustrante es que además de la pobreza, las mujeres, niñas y niños siguen siendo víctimas de violencia sexual y cuentan con menos apoyo. Además, las víctimas que ya se habían decidido a hablar, a denunciar, se sienten ahora más vulnerables porque su proceso de empoderamiento se suspendió; ya no pueden participar en reuniones, en capacitaciones, nos llaman con frecuencia a preguntarnos cuándo vamos a volver a reunirnos. El COVID-19 nos ha encerrado en las casas, rompiendo procesos de empoderamiento y nuestra presencia en lo público, haciéndonos más vulnerables porque los sistemas judiciales y de atención están también suspendidos durante las cuarentenas, y los modelos alternativos que han creado para que las víctimas denuncien no funcionan.

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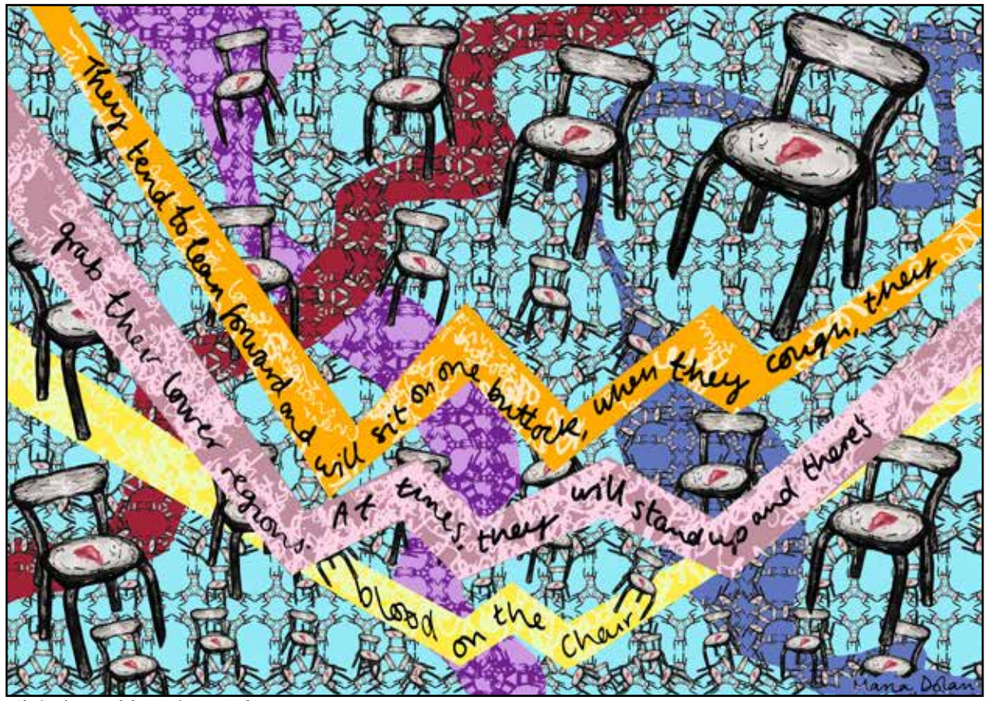
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY THE REFUGEE LAW PROJECT

I am Bebine Alfonse (not real name), I am a 43 years old Congolese refugee man in Uganda. I am a Mukusu. In February 2006, I joined a political party called 'Rassemblement Pour Le Leadership Du Congo (RLC)'. I was arrested by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) national police in my home in Kinshasa in May 2007 and taken to the police headquarters in Kinshasa and detained for three days of interrogation. Officers asked me about my connections to opposition candidates of that time and forced me to perform push-ups on the floor.

After this arrest in 2007, I resumed my business in Kinshasa with minimal disturbance from the government. In 2010, I organized the 'Rassemblement pour Le Leadership Du Congo' party (RLC). Our party members were harassed by the Government and in May 2010 I was questioned by security intelligence officers about our relationship with Jean Pierre Bemba and Tshisekedi, the opposition leader. That same month our offices were attacked, and our documents were stolen. I also received threatening messages on my phone and in December 2010 I moved to eastern DRC for safety. When Joseph Kabila won the election on 9 December 2011, it sparked off scenes of violence across the country. The following March, I took part in debate on National Radio and Television Center (RTNC) where I criticized the government's handling of the elections. Shortly thereafter, my office in Butembo was set on fire, and when I reported the incident to the police I was arrested and detained.

On the night of 28 March 2012, I was dragged into a military pickup, blindfolded with a piece of black cloth and driven to an undisclosed location in Butembo, North Kivu. I found a group of over 15 soldiers. The soldiers removed the blindfold from my eyes and ordered me to unload Tantalite or Coltan from the vehicle. When I refused, they pointed the gun at my head and told me that, if I didn't do it, they would shoot



Chairs | Artwork by Maria Joao Dolan

me dead. After unloading the coltan two soldiers took me to a small house where I found eight other soldiers standing inside. As soon as I entered the house, one of them accused me of causing trouble in the country and disturbing the government. The soldiers placed me in a circle, undressed me and slapped me hard on my face. All the soldiers beat me on the back with the butts of their guns, punched me and stamped on my body until I bled. The soldiers also made a hole in the ground, and a lady soldier who was among them asked me to have sex with that hole. I refused. A man punched me so strongly in the face that I fell and cried in pain. I tried to fight back but one of the soldiers tried to put a rope around my neck and tied me to a roof beam. Then, I heard a voice on the walkie talkie ordering the commanding officer to put me down. The commanding officer told me I was lucky because he fully intended to hang me to silence me permanently. He commanded his soldiers to give me a lesson I would never forget and they untied the rope from the roof top and I fell down. One of them grabbed my genitals hard, and I could feel someone removing my pants roughly. I was left totally naked. Several hands held me down and I could feel someone trying to force his penis into my anus and rape me and they were laughing loudly saying that I was 'disturbing the country'. One of the female soldiers tried to push a stick in my anus, and I cried loudly of pain. They laughed and started beating me again. They were seven or eight of them. I remember that one of them was a woman. I was bleeding too much by the nose and my anus was very painful and I lost consciousness. I woke up when a soldier poured freezing water on me, and I could now hear them discussing. Some wanted to kill me, saying that if they kept me alive, I would report to human right organizations what they have done to me. Eventually they put me back in a pick-up with soldiers who stopped at a particular Avenue, pushed me out of the vehicle and told me to go home.

I was ashamed of myself and disturbed in the mind as fellow men had taken my dignity away by sexually abusing me. When my wife saw the injuries all over my body she started crying. She told me that on the same night I was taken, she had gone to look for me at the police station in Butembo and was told that I was not there. A relative of mine working with the security forces alerted me that my name was on a blacklist, and he advised us not to return home and to leave Butembo immediately.

I could not report these atrocities done to me to any authority in DRC since the same authorities persecuted me and were still hunting me to destroy my life forever. I still suffer backache, ulcers and my nose is painful since perpetrators broke it in DRC. I cannot have sexual intercourse with my wife due to the untreated sexual related complications/injuries I succumbed to during the violation, i.e. lack of appetite for sex, swollen and painful penis, erectile dysfunction, waist and backache, on top of having anal pain with fecal incontinence.

After the 'Refugee Law Project' took me for medical treatment in May 2013, I felt a lot better. The 'Men of Hope Refugee Association' in Uganda helped me develop trust in some people and self-confidence. Now I can share my experience with other survivors and show them how to cope with trauma. When I told my wife about the sexual violence, she disclosed that when she searched for me at the police station, they had also held her there and gang-raped her. When the first case of COVID-19 outbreak in Uganda was reported in March 2020, President Yoweri Museveni Kaguta instituted a total lockdown. Access to medical and psychosocial services became problematic since service providers closed their doors in accordance with the Presidential directive.

My name is James Peter (not real name). I was born on 2 May 1979. I am a male survivor of sexual violence. I am from the Ituri Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and I am from the Hema tribe. Trouble started in 1998 when then-President Laurent Kabila gave an order to all Congolese citizens and the army to kill all Rwandan and Ugandan troops. Because my father was popular among the people and had a close resemblance to Rwandans, the Kabila soldiers accused him of being an ally of the Rwandans. It was at this point when my father's problems began. Some men in plain clothes came home to ask us questions about our father and his relationship with the Rwandan soldiers. My father was arrested and put under police custody for two days; this was around 23 November 1998. He was initially released after being found innocent, but only two days later (25 November 1998) unknown people knocked on our door. The family opened the door, and these people forcibly entered the house and destroyed everything inside. My father and mother were shot and killed. My sisters died from the rape and torture they went through at the hands of the attackers. A neighbour witnessed what happened from a distance and I returned home after it had happened.

EXPERIENCE DURING FLIGHT:

My brothers and I snuck out of Komanda that night and escaped to Masisi in North Kivu, DRC. After walking the whole day hungry we met some men dressed in civilian clothes. The men welcomed us and gave us some food and water to eat. After almost three hours, we realised that we were in the hands of rebels. It was the Democratic Front for the Rwanda (FDLR) rebel group. When we refused to join them, they called us dogs and told us that they would teach us a lesson that we would live to remember. At night the FDLR rebels beat us with butts of a gun. They told us to remove our clothes and bend over. We thought they were going to whip us. But we saw one of the FDLR rebels remove his clothes and he started performing a sexual act on my elder brother, and the rest joined him. Two of the rebels came to me and they told me to bend over as well. At first, I resisted, but I had nothing to do but accept and do everything the way they wanted because they were many of them. They pulled me in all directions and beat me with butts of a gun. I cannot remember the exact number because it was at night, but they were more than six in number. They used a lot of force. It was so painful, and so much blood came out of my anus. During that time, I felt like they should just kill me and not leave me alive.

I never expected such a thing to happen to me, and I felt ashamed and helpless because I could not protect myself from being sexually abused by my fellow men. My brother and I were both gang-raped several times by different men for two days, and when we were released, we were weak and bleeding from the anus. We walked for two days to Masisi where one of the village elders took us to the village secretary for identification purposes.

We reported to the village secretary what had happened to us while we were held captive by the rebels. The chairman took us to the police to record a statement and later to a private clinic. Although we did not expect to be treated well after reporting that we had been sexually violated at the hands of armed men, we were fortunate to be treated with dignity by both the police and the chairman of the village.

We feared the rebels would learn that we were in the village and abduct us again, so we decided to flee to Uganda. There was no proper functional court of law with a judge; The village elders and leaders handled all matters. I do not expect any compensation or support from the DRC government. The only justice for me will be to see peace return to our country DRC and for me to go home without any fear of being killed or sexually violated by any armed persons.

In Uganda, we received medical treatment with the help of the Refugee Law Project without any cost. After getting the treatment, we felt better. I think the DRC government should have a more substantial military presence in the community to avoid the constant attacks by unknown armed groups. Furthermore, the perpetrators of sexual violence should be brought to account for what they have done to avoid others from committing the same and causing pain to the community.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected me. I can no longer continue to do petty business in the city suburb as I used to do. The only capital I had before the lockdown run out. I am not able to pay for medical treatment. I have failed to get work. I live on support from friends and sometimes do casual work in the community to survive. I could not go for medical visit during the lockdown because the Refugee Law Project offices were closed.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG SOLIDARITÉ FÉMININE POUR LA PAIX ET LE DÉVELOPPEMENT INTÉGRAL (SOFEPADI)

Je suis une femme âgée de 23 ans. Je viens de Djugu en province de l'Ituri. J'ai été victime de violences sexuelles en juin 2020 alors que je revenais du marché ne sachant pas que les miliciens avaient déjà entouré notre village. Chaque semaine je vais à Bunia (chef-lieu de la province de l'Ituri) pour y écouler les produits du champ que nous produisons au village. C'est au chemin du retour qu'un groupe d'hommes habillés en tenues militaires nous a brutalisés et ravi tout l'argent que nous avons gagné ce jour-là. Nous étions trois et toutes on a été violées systématiquement. Nous nous sommes abritées dans un village proche et on y a passé la nuit jusqu'au matin. Connaissant notre communauté, nous sommes convenues avec les autres femmes que nous chercherions de l'aide en silence sans que cette histoire ne soit connue par qui que ce soit dans le village, pour éviter que cela nous apporte malheur. Et une femme parmi nous était déjà mariée et craignait que cela soit su par son mari et par sa belle-famille. Puis, quelques jours après, la situation sécuritaire était devenue très mauvaise et nous avions abandonné le village pour nous retrouver dans ce camp de déplacés où nous sommes arrivés en septembre 2020. Selon les conditions du camp, on ne pouvait pas quitter le camp car tout le monde craignait la COVID-19. En octobre, les agents de la SOFEPADI avaient apporté des vivres et des kits de dignité ici au camp pour distribuer aux femmes. Une dame parlait aussi de la possibilité de dénoncer toutes les violences et comment accéder aux soins médicaux. Le même jour, j'ai approché cette femme-là en secret et je lui ai raconté mon problème. Elle m'a présentée à la psychologue puis ils m'ont emmené à leur centre médical qui n'est pas loin du camp. Je souffrais des infections et là je continue à suivre le traitement et les conseils de la psychologue.

Connaissant l'attitude de la communauté et même de la famille, j'en avais parlé à personne, ni à mes propres amies et parents, car je craignais qu'on me juge et que personne ne comprenne ce que j'ai subi ce jour-là. Seulement l'assistante de la SOFEPADI qui m'avait promis de n'en parler qu'au médecin qui pouvait m'aider. Puis elle m'a orienté au centre médical. Toute la prise en charge est gratuite depuis le début du traitement, et même les médicaments.

Je souhaite bien obtenir justice mais je ne connais même pas ces auteurs et je ne sais même pas s'ils sont encore vivants. Quand je me sentirai prête, je pourrai témoigner devant la justice. S'il y avait la paix en Ituri, moi ou d'autres femmes ne serions pas victimes de cette barbarie. Et même, si nous avions eu l'information ce jour-là, nous ne serions pas tombées entre les mains de ces hommes.

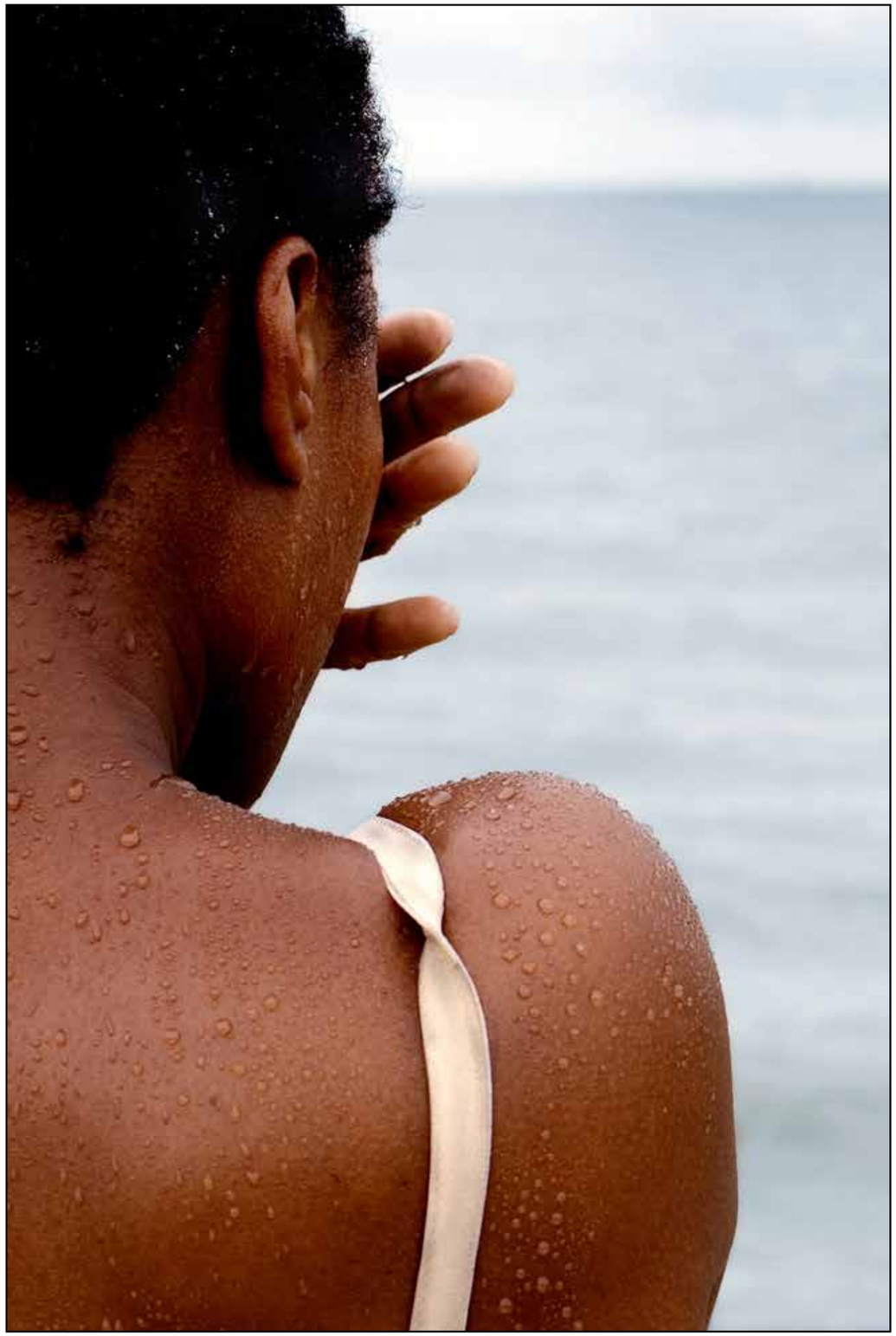


Photo | IF Productions

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG SOLIDARITÉ FÉMININE POUR LA PAIX ET LE DÉVELOPPEMENT INTÉGRAL (SOFEPADI)

UN Photo | Staton Winter

Mon nom est Kalugeo (pseudonyme), je suis une jeune femme de 30 ans, je vie en République Démocratique du Congo, Province du Nord Kivu, en territoire de Beni. Je me souviens bien de ce jour, j'avais laissé les enfants chez ma voisine et je m'étais rendue au champ, comme chaque jour. J'ai rejoint mon mari et mes parents qui s'y étaient rendus avant moi. Quelques instants après mon arrivée au champ, les ADF/NALU ont fait incursion dans le village et ils nous ont surpris dans le champ. Ils ont tué mon mari à l'instant même, puis ils nous ont emmené de forces, mon père, ma mère et moi. Ils étaient nombreux (hommes et femmes) et vêtus en tenues militaires déchirées et portant des armes. Après plusieurs kilomètres de marche en transportant leurs butins de guerre, ils ont tué ma mère et mon beau père, puis ils m'ont conduite dans leur champ où j'ai trouvé d'autres détenues. Ils nous utilisaient comme des esclaves et nous devions chercher à manger dans des champs abandonnés, faire tous les travaux ménagers. Ces hommes nous prenaient à tout moment pour satisfaire leurs désirs sexuels. Et même quand ils nous escortaient pour chercher les produits dans des champs, chacun pouvait se rabattre sur nous en nous violant systématiquement. Au moment du kidnapping, j'étais enceinte de huit semaines et malgré tout ce que j'ai subi, j'ai pu accoucher là-bas même, avec l'aide des autres détenus.

Sept mois après la naissance de mon enfant, lors d'une sortie pour chercher à manger dans le champ, l'un des rebelles qui nous avait accompagné, m'a permis de m'échapper vu mon état de santé médiocre et celui de mon enfant. Lorsque nous nous sommes enfuis en juin 2020, 16 mois après notre kidnapping, nous nous sommes retrouvés dans le village de Mukoko, mon fils, moi et une autre femme beaucoup plus âgée que moi. De là, la population a voulu nous tuer croyant que nous étions des espionnes des ADF. Puis nous leur avons expliqué la situation et ils nous ont conduits auprès d'un chef de Oicha qui a appelé les militaires des FARDC (forces armées de la RDC). Après l'enquête, ils nous ont laissé partir.

Arrivés au village, le reste de ma famille était surpris et, voyant mon état, ils ont fait appel à une animatrice de la SOFEPADI qui nous a amené à son bureau où, après avoir écouté l'histoire par la psychologue, elle nous a orienté à l'hôpital pour les soins médicaux, mon fils et mois. Jusqu'à aujourd'hui elle continue à m'accompagner psychologiquement. Je n'ai rien payé car on m'avait rassuré que SOFEPADI allait tout prendre en charge.

J'ai été traitée avec dignité par les membres de ma famille car ils pensaient que j'étais déjà morte. Mais dans la communauté, certaines personnes nous pointent du doigt en disant que nous sommes des collaboratrices des ADF, que nous sommes des espionnes, etc. Certains insultent mon enfant car ils pensent que je l'ai eu dans la brousse. Suite à cette stigmatisation, je me sens mal pour me rendre même au marché ou m'afficher dans les endroits publics tels que les églises. A la SOFEPADI, ils m'ont intégrée dans un groupe de l'Association Villageoise d'Epargne et de Crédit (AVEC) et là j'ai bénéficié d'un petit crédit rotatif qui m'a permis de mettre en place ma petite boutique des épices. Je souhaite obtenir justice auprès du tribunal, car j'espère que ces personnes seront retrouvées et punies. Mais mon souhait est qu'il y ait la paix et que nous puissions continuer tranquillement notre vie.

UN Photo | Marie Frechon

Mon nom est Kasali (pseudonyme), j'ai 27 ans et je vis à Beni en province du Nord Kivu en RDC. J'ai été victime de violence sexuelle le 2 janvier 2013 vers 15h alors que nous revenions de notre champ, mes trois autres sœurs, mon frère et mon père. En chemin, nous avons rencontré les Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (Forces démocratiques alliées-Armée nationale de libération de l'Ouganda, ADF-Nalu). Ils nous ont demandé de déposer nos fardeaux et l'un des deux m'a demandé de le suivre; puis, je n'ai jamais eu des nouvelles de ma famille. Arrivés à Madina, nous avons été emprisonnés et celui ou celle qui refusait d'être musulman était directement tué. Après quatre mois, leur commandant nous a attribué à chacune un homme et nous étions traitées comme des esclaves. C'est difficile à raconter... Moi j'ai été attribuée comme femme à un guerrier qui pouvait tout faire sur moi pour satisfaire ses désirs sexuels.

Lorsque nous avons fui de ces lieux, neuf mois après, on a été conduits chez le Général Bahuma des FARDC. Trois jours après il nous a demandé de rentrer au village et moi je suis rentrée chez nous à Oicha où j'ai retrouvé ma famille en bonne forme. Ils m'ont reçu avec dignité, ils pensaient même que j'étais déjà morte.

Par contre, les autres membres de la communauté m'ont traité sans respect ni considération. C'est difficile de vivre avec l'étiquette de « femme des ADF ». Quand les tueries se sont multipliées dans notre village, certaines personnes me pointaient du doigt disant que je suis communicatrice des ADF et je leur donne l'information sur le village. Tout cela me poussait à avoir des idées suicidaires. Mon histoire est bien connue par les services militaires.

Un jour alors que j'étais malade, une dame à la cité m'a orientée vers la SOFEPADI où j'ai bénéficié de la prise en charge médicale et psychologique gratuitement, jusqu'à ce que je me sois rétablie. Je ne suis pas allée en justice, j'ai juste demandé à la SOFEPADI de m'aider à reconstruire ma vie. Mais je suis prête à témoigner de ce que j'ai vécu car d'autres personnes, surtout des femmes, sont encore entre les mains de ces ADF et n'ont pas pu s'échapper.

En 2015, j'ai été formée avec les autres femmes sur la gestion d'une activité génératrice de revenu. Puis après nous avons bénéficié des champs communautaires mis en place par la SOFEPADI où nous cultivons des amarantes et d'autres légumes, que nous vendons pour nous prendre en charge. Je ne souhaite que la paix, car depuis que l'insécurité s'est généralisée dans la ville et territoire de Beni, je ne sais plus quoi faire.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG SOLIDARITÉ FÉMININE POUR LA PAIX ET LE DÉVELOPPEMENT INTÉGRAL (SOFEPADI)

UN Photo | Staton Winter

Je suis psychologue au centre Médical de la SOFEPADI. L'âge des survivants des violences basées sur le genre (VBG) varie entre 2-65 ans et plus de 95% des survivants sont des filles. Les survivants de violences sexuelles (SVS) enregistrés et accompagnés proviennent surtout du Territoire de Djugu et d'Irumu. Ils (elles) ont subi des viols (collectifs) et des agressions physiques pendant qu'ils (elles) fuyaient les atrocités (pendant le déplacement). D'autres ont été violés dans leur maison, dans le champ, ou dans leur camp de déplacés internes. Les services déclarent que les agressions subies sont commises par les forces/groupes/milices armées non étatiques présents en Province de l'Ituri (FPIC, CODECO, …) et par les forces armées de l'état (FARDC). Les survivants nous sont référés en grande partie par les familles des SVS, la police/Parquet de Grande Instance, les ONGs tant locales, nationales qu'internationales (APS), et les prestataires de services. Les patients présentent des plaintes psychologiques (peur/éviter des grossesses non désirées, infections sexuellement transmissibles (IST), sentiments d'isolement, de dévalorisation, …) et somatiques (douleurs corporelles, IST, etc.). Beaucoup de survivants nous arrivent au-delà des délais de 72h, parfois inferieurs à 72h, inferieurs à 120h et supérieur à 3 mois. Les membres de famille font pressions sur les SVS afin qu'ils (elles) dénoncent. Les victimes ne signalent pas l'incident parce qu'il n'y a pas à proximité un centre auquel s'adresser mais aussi pour d'autres raisons, telles que des problèmes de transports. Certain(e)s déclarent avoir subi des traitements différents (rejet familial) de la part leur famille et communauté. Les malades accueillis au centre Karibuni Wa Mama (CKWM) bénéficient des soins gratuits. Il s'agit de la prise en charge (PEC) médicale (la santé sexuelle et reproductive, les IST), accompagnement ou soutien psychosocial, accompagnement juridique et judiciaire. Les fonds pour l'accompagnement des dossiers juridiques/judicaires sont à la charge de la SOFEPADI. Les services sont fournis par des médecins, infirmiers, psychologues, avocats/juristes. Dans le cadre juridique, certains jugements sont rendus en faveur des victimes/survivant(e)s, mais ces derniers n'ont pas encore bénéficié de dédommagements (réparations). Les autorités policières et judicaires exigent souvent de frais aux familles des survivants de VBG. Les survivant(e)s reçoivent des soins médicaux gratuits et ne payent rien, même les certificats médicaux sont obtenus gratuitement, mais les frais de justices sont payés par la SOFEPADI. Les survivant(e)s souhaitent obtenir une meilleure information sur les principales zones de risque, sur la présence de groupes armés et sur le risque de violence sexuelle. Ils/elles souhaitent aussi de meilleures mesures de sécurité, telles que points d'eau dans le village.

J'interviens en tant que médecin attaché au centre médical Karibuni Wa Mama de la SOFEPADI. Je suis Elisabeth, une femme de 31 ans. Je suis de la Province de l'Ituri / Territoire de Djugu, en RDC. Les viols et les agressions physiques sont généralement les formes de violences que nous recevons et traitons au centre médical Karibuni Wa Mama. Les victimes subissent les violences à domicile, elles sont particulièrement vulnérables sur la route, lors de déplacement dans des régions des conflits (Djugu, Irumu) vers les zones jugées en sécurité (Bunia et ses environs) et dans leurs camps de déplacés internes.

Les auteurs appartiennent aux forces armées de l'État, aux forces de police de l'État, à des groupes / milices armés non étatiques. Souvent il s'agit de personnes non identifiées portant un uniforme ou des vêtements civils.

Les victimes sont souvent signalées/référées par les membres de familles, la Police, le parquet, les ONG et les prestataires de services. Nous respectons les principes directeurs de gestion de cas, à savoir le droit à la confidentialité et à la dignité de la victime. Certaines arrivent au-delà des 72h, d'autres inferieurs ou supérieurs à trois mois, suite aux distances qui séparent les victimes de notre Centre Médical. D'autres victimes ne signalent pas l'incident parce qu'elles craignent des représailles; d'être stigmatisé(e)s; du fait de pressions des membres de la famille et de la communauté préfèrent garder le silence; parce qu'elles ne savent pas vers qui se tourner; parce qu'il n'y a pas à proximité d'elles un centre auquel s'adresser; pour d'autres raisons telles que des problèmes de transport.

Certaines victimes accusent leurs membres de famille et proches de les traiter différemment (rejet familial, social et communautaire). D'autres mineures déclarent qu'elles sont parfois fouettées et frappées, voire chassées du toit parental. Les victimes accueillies au Centre Médical reçoivent des soins médicaux adéquats. Ces soins portent sur la santé sexuelle et reproductive; à un soutien psychosocial; à des services juridiques. Ces traitements sont fournis par les médecins (infirmiers formés), les psychologues et les avocats/juridiques. L'accès en justice est encore un lux pour plusieurs, mais pour celles accompagnées par la SOFEPADI, les jugements sont rendus par le tribunal. Mais les victimes accèdent difficilement aux dommages et intérêt par le bourreau. Cette situation engendre parfois des arrangements à l'amiable et décourage l'accès à la justice. Les autorités policières et judiciaires exigent de l'argent aux familles des victimes. C'est pourquoi, ces victimes préfèrent recourir aux ONGs, comme notre organisation.

Les frais de soins médicaux et ceux de la justice sont à la charge de la SOFEPADI. Les victimes souhaitent avoir une meilleure information sur les principales zones de risque, le risque de violences sexuelles; de meilleures mesures de sécurité telles que l'accès aux points d'eau dans le village. La pandémie de COVID-19 ne nous a pas empêchés de soigner les victimes de VBG, sauf que nous avons réduit les fréquences de RDV. Nous avons remis aux victimes détenant un téléphone, le numéro vert de la SOFEPADI. Ce numéro nous a permis les suivis et évaluations de nos malades à distance.

UN Photo | Abel Kavanagh

UN Photo | Sylvain Liechti

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ONG SOLIDARITÉ FÉMININE POUR LA PAIX ET LE DÉVELOPPEMENT INTÉGRAL (SOFEPADI)

Je m'appelle Kakaro (pseudonyme), je suis une femme de 85 ans. Je suis de la République Démocratique du Congo (RDC) province du Nord-Kivu, ville de Beni. En date du 30 décembre 2019 vers 13h alors que j'étais au champ à Mavivi, non loin du camp militaire de la FARDC (forces armées de la RDC). J'ai été surprise par des hommes portant une tenue militaire, sans souliers avec un masque au visage. L'un d'eux m'a dit de quitter mon champ après avoir récupérer ma machette pendant que l'autre me serrait au cou. C'était un militaire FARDC qui avait l'habitude de passer chez moi car ma résidence est tout près du camp militaire. Il n'avait pas d'arme, il portait un masque à tricot noir trouer au niveau des yeux, il était pieds nus. Je les ai suppliés de me laisser mais ils avaient un autre but. Ils m'ont brutalisée et ont commis leur forfait sur moi.

Je criais mais personne ne pouvait m'entendre. Après avoir été violée, j'ai retenu le visage de l'un des violeurs car il avait ôté son masque. Pendant que je me défendais, ils m'ont blessé avec la machette à la figure et à l'avant-bras droit. J'ai perdu connaissance et c'est à 16h que je me suis réveillée et je me suis efforcée à rejoindre le village. Mais cela était difficile car à quelques mètres, je me suis de nouveau évanouie jusqu'au matin quand mes petits fils m'ont trouvée comme morte. Ils ont cherché de l'aide et m'ont amenée à l'hôpital et depuis je ne vois pas de mon œil gauche.

Le lendemain du fait lorsque je suis arrivée à l'hôpital ma fille est partie dénoncer à l'ONG SOFEPADI. Ma famille m'a traitée avec dignité et m'a soutenue car j'ai passé au moins trois semaines à l'hôpital. Rapidement j'ai eu accès aux soins médicaux, au soutien psychologique et au service juridique grâce à la SOFEPADI. La SOFEPADI m'a accompagnée à l'auditorat militaire, j'ai été auditionnée et l'agresseur a été arrêté. Jusqu'aujourd'hui mon dossier est toujours en cours. Je n'ai pas encore obtenu de dédommagement pour le préjudice subi. Seulement la SOFEPADI a pris en charge le coût de toute la procédure. Je suis traitée très différemment car suis devenue handicapées et myope.

Les voisins continuent à me pointer du doigt que j'ai été violée et que je suis devenue une charge à ma famille qui aujourd'hui s'occupe de tous mes besoins. Je ne peux plus aller au champ, je ne peux plus me laver seule, je ne peux plus rien faire moi-même. C'est difficile d'être dépendante à mon âge…

J'ai été victime durant la période de confinement pendant la COVID-19 et à cause de l'insécurité, beaucoup des personnes ne partent plus au champ. Si la vie était comme d'habitude, ces gens n'allaient pas m'avoir. Aussi durant cette période de la pandémie, la procédure au tribunal traine beaucoup et je suis toujours dans la peur. Nous avons besoin de la paix, rien que la paix.

Je m'appelle Mapite (pseudonyme), je suis une fille de 15 ans. Je suis de Nord-Kivu, Kabasha, en RDC. J'ai été violée le 17 août 2020 par trois éléments Mai-Mai inconnus, en arme blanche, les uns en tenue moitié civile et militaire. Ce jour-là quand ils ont fait incursion dans notre village, j'étais en route car j'accompagnais mon amie. Ils m'ont pris comme otage et m'ont demandé de leur montrer chez nous. Arrivés chez nous, ils ont demandé à ma mère 50.000 franc congolais mais elle n'avait pas cette somme à ce moment-là. Elle les a suppliés de me laisser en leur disant qu'elle pouvait leur remettre une poule, mais ils ont refusé. Puis ils m'ont emmenée avec eux et m'ont violée dans la nuit, tous les trois à tour de rôle. Ma mère a signalé le fait auprès d'un para juriste de SOFEPADI et j'ai été accompagné aux soins médicaux. J'ai été traitée avec dignité et respect. La dame de la SOFEPADI m'avait amené à l'hôpital général et j'ai été soigné. J'ai encore d'autres rendez-vous à l'hôpital. Au bureau de la SOFEPADI, une psychologue parle souvent avec moi et m'a dit de continuer à venir selon le programme qu'elle a communiqué à ma mère. Ils ont payé aussi le transport à ma mère et moi.

Photo MONUSCO

J'avais honte de raconter ce qui m'était arrivé, je n'avais jamais couché avec un homme. J'ai été victime de stigmatisation par ma famille et ma communauté. Mes petites frères et sœurs ont commencé à dire que je suis devenue prostituée. Malheureusement pour moi, l'histoire était connue par tout le monde. Mais ma mère et ma grand-mère m'ont toujours soutenue. Malgré ça, j'ai juste envie de quitter mon village.

Il faut enlever ces miliciens Mai-Mai de notre village car, comme moi, beaucoup de filles sont en danger. Je n'ai pas voulu aller à la justice, car je ne pourrais rien recevoir comme dédommagement. Aussi je ne connais pas ces personnes. J'ai juste besoin de me sentir bien et de continuer l'école. La SOFEPADI a supporté tous les coûts et même a payé la totalité de frais scolaire pour cette année. J'ai été victime de violence sexuelle pendant la pandémie de COVID-19 mais rien n'a vraiment changé car les hôpitaux fonctionnent et nous avons repris l'école.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR DES CONSEILLERS EN PROTECTION DES FEMMES (WPA PAR SON ACRONYME ANGLAIS) ET DES OFFICIERS DES DROITS DE L'HOMME DU BUREAU CONJOINT DES NATIONS UNIES POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME

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Je m'appelle Mape. J'ai 45 ans, je suis une femme mariée et mère de neuf enfants. Je suis domiciliée dans le territoire de Shabunda, province du Sud-Kivu, en RDC. Je n'oublierai jamais cette journée du 15 septembre 2020. C'était aux environs de midi, cette heure où les femmes de mon village se retrouvent sur le chemin pour le grand marché de Kankinda. Ce jour-là, comme d'habitude, une foule de femmes marchaient bavardant et heureuses de se rapprocher enfin du marché, distant de plus de 15 km de notre village. Nous étions sept femmes avec nos marchandises sur le dos, discutant tranquillement pour ne pas sentir le poids de nos fardeaux et la longueur de la route, lorsque brusquement, dans une petite allée, un groupe de 10 hommes armés nous a surpris en nous encerclant et en nous demandant de nous arrêter. Au début, comme nous ne pouvions pas bien voir avec les fardeaux sur les dos, nous avions pensé que c'étaient les services de la chefferie qui collectent les taxes. C'étaient des éléments d'un groupe armé actif dans la zone. Nous avions exécuté l'ordre et c'est là que nous nous sommes rendues compte qu'ils étaient cagoulés, armés et machettes à la main, en tenue civile, et au moins huit d'entre eux avaient une cigarette à la bouche. Ils nous ont demandé de les suivre, en file. Ils nous ont encerclés. Nous avons marché encore 5 km vers la forêt.

En pleine forêt, ils nous ont demandé de nous arrêter et de déposer nos fardeaux et de nous déshabiller. C'était horrible. Dans cette équipe de femmes, il y avait des jeunes filles entre 18 et 25 ans et nous, qui étions plus âgées, avions honte de nous déshabiller. Mais ils nous ont forcées, en nous battant et en nous injuriant. Ils ont commencé à nous violer l'une après l'autre.

J'étais la 2ème à subir cet acte ignoble. J'ai été violée par quatre personnes. C'était humiliant et dégradant. J'avais très mal, j'ai même perdu connaissance. Après leur sale besogne, ils ont fouillé nos vêtements et pris tout ce que nous avions comme argent. A moi, ils ont pris une somme d'argent importante qui était destinée à l'achat d'articles divers que j'exposaient dans le petit marché de mon village et qui m'aidait à subvenir aux besoins familiaux.

En me réveillant, ils étaient déjà partis. Personne parmi nous n'avait un téléphone, nous avons été obligées de reprendre nos fardeaux pour rentrer au village car il était déjà tard. Nous avons convenu de ne rien dire à qui que ce soit. Mais la nouvelle de notre enlèvement s'est répandue dans le village, sans savoir qui l'avait fait.

Personnellement, je n'ai parlé à personne de ce qui m'était arrivé et comme mon mari ne s'intéressait pas à mon commerce, il n'a jamais posé la question de savoir pourquoi je n'avais pas apporté la marchandise comme d'habitude. Je ne savais rien d'une quelconque prise en charge et je ne pouvais me confier à personne, car je n'avais confiance en personne. Je suis restée comme ça pendant des mois, avec la douleur physique et mentale. Ce n'est qu'en février 2021 que j'ai eu des informations sur des services de prise en charge médicale, psychosociale et juridique, organisés à Kigulube centre, avec l'appui du BCNUDH.

J'ai cherché un moyen d'annoncer à mon mari que je me rendais à Kigulube pour voir des membres de la famille, mais il a voulu en savoir plus sur la motivation de cette visite, à plusieurs km de mon village. Cela faisait plus de 10 ans que je n'étais pas allée les voir. J'ai juste insisté que j'avais besoin de les voir. C'est alors que je suis arrivée à la clinique juridique, j'ai été orientée vers le centre hospitalier où j'ai reçu les soins et gloire à Dieu, je n'avais pas contracté des maladies sexuellement transmissibles ni de grossesse. J'ai rencontré aussi le psychologue clinicien qui m'a beaucoup aidée à retrouver confiance en moi. Je suis rentrée à la clinique juridique où j'ai donné mon consentement pour participer à des enquêtes judiciaires. J'ai vraiment été dignement traitée par les services de prise en charge. Avec les conseils du psychologue, j'ai parlé à mon mari de ce qui m'était arrivé. Il était irrité et très en colère contre moi, il a passé trois semaines hors du toit conjugal. Il a même convoqué une réunion de famille où il annonçait qu'il ne voulait plus vivre avec moi. Les membres de famille lui ont prodigué des conseils, il a fini par comprendre mais il ne m'a plus jamais touchée depuis.

J'espère vivement que la justice fasse son travail en recherchant, arrêtant et en jugeant tous ces bourreaux pour que plus jamais ils ne fassent de mal à aucune femme. Je suis psychologiquement prête à participer aux audiences foraines pour que justice soit faite, pas seulement pour moi mais pour la multitude des femmes qui ont subis ces actes odieux dans mon village. Et même si je n'ai pas dépensé de l'argent pour les différents services de prises en charge, j'ai perdu mon capital de commerce. Je ne sais pas comment le reconstituer. Il m'a été annoncé qu'une phase de réinsertion socio-économique est en cours et je souhaite vivement d'en bénéficier pour relancer mes activités commerciales. En attendant, je travaille pour les détenteurs de champs qui me paient à la tâche et j'essaie de survivre avec ça. Si je pouvais accéder aux autorités, je demanderais qu'elles renforcent les mesures de sécurité dans nos villages; que les effectifs et les capacités de forces de sécurité soient renforcés; que les services de prise en charge de base soient renforcés afin que les personnes victimes d'actes de violences sexuelles y accèdent facilement.

Maintenant avec la COVID-19, l'économie est au ralenti. Il est très difficile d'accéder aux biens de premières nécessités quand j'en ai besoin. Avec les mesures restrictives, les activités sont au ralenti et cela impacte négativement la vie dans le village.

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Je suis Odile, j'ai 36 ans, je viens de Largu, dans le territoire de Djugu, Province de l'Ituri. Je suis de la communauté Hema et je suis veuve. J'ai 10 enfants et j'ai perdu mon mari qui a été décapité en janvier 2019 par des assaillants de CODECO à Largu. J'ai été violée deux fois, la 1ère fois en juin 2020 aux environs de 12h et la 2ème fois le 23 février 2021 aux environs de 14h.

La 1ère fois j'ai été violée par quatre assaillants de CODECO à tour de rôle, la 2ème fois par un assaillant de CODECO.

Lors du premier viol, j'avais été prise dans la brousse d'Ambi près de Kparnganza. J'allais chercher du manioc au champ, de quoi nourrir mes enfants sur une moto-taxi en y allant par la voie de la brousse. En route, des assaillants sont apparus devant nous. Ils nous ont menacés de nous tuer tous les deux, si nous ne leur donnions pas 200 $ chacun. Tous les deux, le motard et moi avons été projetés à terre par les assaillants armés, mais le taximan-motard s'est rapidement relevé en reprenant sa moto et s'est sauvé, m'abandonnant ainsi.

De ce fait, cinq assaillants m'ont tirée de force dans la brousse. Parmi ces cinq assaillants, quatre étaient munis de fusil et l'un des cinq était muni de machette. Ils m'ont tirée par les pieds dans la brousse. L'un des assaillants a proposé de me tuer en disant qu'ils n'avaient pas besoin des Hema. Les autres s'y sont opposés disant qu'on ne peut pas laisser partir une femme Hema aussi grasse que j'étais. « Il faut absolument la violer », ont-ils dit. Je tremblais déjà et n'avais plus aucune force. Ils m'ont d'abord battue à coups de pied, puis m'ont déchirée tous mes vêtements et m'ont violée tous les quatre à tour de rôle. Ils me criaient que le jour de ma mort était venu. C'était aux environs de 12h, d'un jour de juin 2020 dont je ne me souviens plus exactement lequel. Je n'ai été libérée que le lendemain à 7h, sans vêtement et sans savoir là où j'étais, ni me rendant compte de ce que j'avais subi. Sans force, j'ai dû marcher très doucement près de 25 km nue, seule et souffrant des déchirures dues au viol. J'ai marché jusqu'à localité de Lita. Là les gens ont pensé que j'étais une folle, mais une maman habitant le village, par pitié, m'a apportée des habits et a compris ce qui m'est arrivé.

La 2ème fois j'ai été violée dans les mêmes circonstances en allant chercher à manger pour mes enfants, comme nous souffrions de la faim à Bunia. J'avais pensé qu'après autant de mois, la situation était redevenue calme à Kparnganza. Comme par malheur, je suis une fois de plus tombée dans l'embuscade de trois assaillants. Un seul membre du groupe m'a violée en me crachant au visage. C'était récemment le 23 février 2021.

Le secteur des Walendu Tatsi est sous la domination des Lendu, qui sont les membres de la milice CODECO. Actuellement il n'y a plus de gens de la communauté Hema dans ce secteur. Nos champs sont encore là, et nous avons besoin d'aller récolter ou chercher à manger pour nos enfants. Ceux qui m'ont fait ça ce sont des assaillants armés de CODECO qui parlaient la langue Lendu et étaient munis de fusil et d'armes blanches. J'ai signalé la situation qui m'est arrivée à une maman qui m'a donné des vêtements à Lita. C'est elle qui m'a orienté au site des déplacés de Kigonze à Bunia. J'ai ainsi parlé à l'assistante psycho-sociale de l'ONG quand même je ne savais plus parler ni marcher. J'ai fait 10h de marche de Lita à Bunia (25 km) parce que je ne savais pas marcher. A Bunia, je continue à être soignée en ambulatoire par le médecin mais les douleurs demeurent dans mon bas-ventre.

Comme nous sommes de nombreuses victimes de viol, chacune essaie de garder pour elle-même ce qui lui est arrivé. La majorité des femmes déplacées internes ont été systématiquement violées par les assaillants de CODECO. Ainsi entre nous femmes, il n'y a pas de discrimination, mais beaucoup de mes amies ont été abandonnées par leurs maris, d'autres ont porté des grossesses non-désirées à cause des viols. A part les services médicaux et l'assistance psycho sociale, je n'ai encore rien reçu d'autre. On m'a parlé de l'appui à la réintégration socio-économique mais je pense que c'est juste pour parler. Je n'ai jamais saisi la justice, je n'ai jamais comparu devant le magistrat, je n'ai jamais porté plainte. J'ai eu peur de voir le magistrat. Je ne connais pas ce que signifie mesure de prévention. Nous pensons souvent que le calme est déjà revenu chez nous, et que nous pouvons y aller pour chercher à manger pour nos enfants. Pour moi, le risque demeure parce que j'ai été violée en février. Ça me fait mal.

UN Photo | Marie Frechon

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Je m'appelle Claudine. J'ai 60 ans, je suis mariée et j'ai des enfants. Je vis à Sasira, dans le territoire d'Uvira. Vers 20h, nous étions avec ma voisine dans la maison en train de parler. Un militaire FARDC en tenue militaire et armée de AK 47 a fait incursion. Les deux amies qui étaient avec moi ont réussi à s'enfuir et moi, comme j'étais dans un coin, l'auteur a commencé à me menacer avec son arme, et il m'a déshabillée. Il m'a ensuite imposé aux rapports sexuels. J'ai crié, mais personne n'est venu à mon secours comme l'auteur était armé.

Après les faits, mon mari est parti alerter le commandant de bataillon. Ce dernier a pu identifier l'auteur et l'a mis en détention. Le commandant a arrêté l'auteur qui était un militaire FARDC du bataillon basé dans la même localité que nos maisons. J'ai reçu le Kit PEP dans les délais. L'incident a été signalée au Bureau conjoint des Nations unies pour les droits de l'Homme à Uvira et on nous a conseillé de porter plainte contre l'auteur. On m'a référée à des cliniques juridiques sur place pour m'accompagner.

Ma communauté ne m'a pas délaissée, et surtout mon mari m'a accompagnée partout. Vous savez à cet âge il a compris que ce n'était pas quelque chose qui a été voulu de ma part. C'est moi même qui me sentais gênée. J'ai eu accès au service médicale, juridique et judiciaire comme je l'avais signalé à l'hôpital général de référence de Sange et la prise en charge était gratuite. Le dossier est passé à l'audience, devant le tribunal militaire de garnison d'Uvira et l'auteur a été condamné. Cependant, de mon côté je n'ai reçu aucun dommage et intérêt, aucune réparation pour tous les préjudices subis.

Tous les frais de la justice et autres dépenses ont été pris en charge par la clinique Juridique. Par rapport aux frais médicaux et certificat médical, aucun frais n'a été demandé ou payé. Cependant, j'ai dû payer les frais de transport pour aller porter plainte à l'auditorat militaire à Uvira.

Mon mari avait décidé de ne plus me laisser seule dans la maison ou de me rendre seule au champ.

L'incident a eu lieu avant l'épidémie de la COVID-19. Mais maintenant, nous subissons les conséquences de la fermeture des écoles. Chaque fois les enfants viennent pour me demander à manger et nous n'avons rien.

UN Photo | Abel Kavanagh

Je m'appelle Christelle et je suis la mère de Sylvie âgée de 15 ans. Nous sommes de Kiminio, dans le territoire de Fizi. En date du 4 avril 2019 vers 19h alors que j'étais absente, mon amie est arrivée à mon domicile en demandant à ma fille de l'accompagner, soi-disant pour l'envoyer acheter du sel. Arrivée chez mon amie, celle-ci a demandé à ma fille de l'attendre au salon pour qu'elle puisse chercher de l'argent dans une autre pièce. C'est là que le militaire se cachait, derrière une porte dans la maison de mon amie. Le militaire est sorti de sa cachette et a fermé la porte d'entrée. Il s'est jeté sur ma fille, en lui bandant la bouche pour l'empêcher de crier. Il a forcé et il a réussi à déshabiller la victime et il l'a obligée aux rapports sexuels sous la menace de son arme. Apres l'acte, l'auteur a remis une somme d'argent équivalent à 10.000 FC (dix mille Franc Congolais) à ma fille, en lui exigeant de ne rien dire à ses parents. Au retour, avec des douleurs et en larmes, ma fille m'a tout expliquée. Mon amie était la complice du militaire.

Je ne pouvais pas garder le silence. J'ai informé le chef de la localité qui à son tour a informé la société civile de Kiminio. Les membres de la société civile, dont une femme du bureau du Genre, sont arrivée jusqu'à chez moi et m'ont mis en contact avec le Bureau conjoint des Nations Unies pour les droits de l'homme à Uvira pour orientation. Le lendemain de l'incident, le 5/05/2019 vers 6h du matin, je suis allée rapporter parce que j'étais très choquée. Jusqu'à aujourd'hui je me souviens de mon ressenti. J'aurais préféré que cela m'arrive à moi, plutôt qu'à ma petite fille. Tout le monde dans le village a eu pitié de moi, surtout vu l'âge de ma fille. Mon amie, qui était en complicité avec l'auteur, disait mal de moi, que j'étais fière de ma fille. Je m'en suis sentie humiliée. Ma fille a eu accès aux services médicaux, juridiques et judiciaires par l'entremise du Bureau conjoint des Nations unies pour les droits de l'homme par son orientation à la clinique juridique de Baraka. Elle a reçu les premiers soins de Kit PEP à Kazimia dans le centre de santé le lendemain, le 5/05/2019, et c'était gratuit.

Le dossier est passé en audiences foraines devant le tribunal militaire garnison d'Uvira, où l'auteur présumé a été transféré par la clinique juridique. Pour les réparations, jusque-là nous n'avons toujours rien obtenu, mais l'auteur présumé est toujours en détention à la prison centrale. Tous les coûts ont été à la charge de la clinique juridique, sauf les frais de transport pour le Kazimia et pour le transport de l'auteur présumé de Kiminio à Uvira.

J'ai jugé bon de quitter le village et d'aller m'installer avec ma famille à Baraka, de peur que les amis de l'auteur présumé me fassent du mal, puisque leur ami est en prison.

UN Photo | Staton Winter

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Je m'appelle Maryline, j'ai 27 ans et je suis mariée. C'était le 22/02/2020 vers 9h à Mutuka, dans la province du Maniema, où j'habitais parce que présentement je suis déplacée interne à Lubichako dans le territoire de Fizi.

Le 22 février vers 9h du matin, ma voisine et moi avions quitté le village pour aller aux champs dans notre village d'origine. Nous avions fui nos champs et nos maisons en 2018 à cause des incursions des Twa qui tuaient, pillaient, et violaient les femmes et les hommes. Au retour des champs vers 15h, nous avions croisé trois hommes habillés en tenue civil mais qui portaient des armes de guerres et des machettes. Ces hommes nous ont obligées à les suivre dans le champ. Quand nous avons refusé, ils ont commencé à nous battre et nous menacer avec leurs armes et machettes. Dans le champ, les auteurs nous ont obligées d'enlever nos habits et nous ont obligées à des rapports sexuels, l'un après autre, avec chacune de nous.

J'avais reconnu les auteurs par leur langage, les armes et les habits qu'ils portaient. Après les faits, ils sont repartis dans la brousse là où ils habitent. J'avais signalé à mon mari qui m'avait conduit dans le centre de santé de Lubichako et mon amie était parti à Lulimba. Après mon mari avait appelé le Bureau conjoint des Nations unies pour les droits de l'Homme à Uvira. Depuis il n'y a pas eu de réponses.

Pour ce qui est des membres de ma communauté, il n'y a pas eu de problème. Ces Twa commettent les mêmes crimes sur les hommes, et pas uniquement aux femmes. C'est pourquoi nous avons décidé avec ma famille de quitter Lubichako pour Uvira. J'ai eu accès aux soins médicaux gratuitement dans la zone de santé Kimbi-Lulenge à Lubichako 1. Jusque-là il n'y a pas de réponse de la justice, parce qu'après notre incident il y a eu beaucoup d'autres. Mon mari, qui était resté à Lubichako, m'a appelée hier pour me dire que les Twa continuent leurs incursions, c'était il y a deux jours c'est-à-dire le 8 mars 2021. Je n'ai pas eu de frais à payer pour le Kit PEP. Il n'y a pas des mesures, nous ne pouvons cesser d'aller aux champs, il n'y a pas autres activités à faire, je suis cultivatrice. Le gouvernement doit voir comment chasser les Twa de nos villages.

Photo | UN WOMEN

UN Photo | Lynsey Addario

Je m'appelle Zeinaba, je suis la maman d'Annie âgée de 13 ans habitant Luvungi, dans le territoire d'Uvira. Ma fille était chez notre voisin qui était devenu comme un membre de notre famille, pour aider sa femme à garder leur enfant quand elle avait beaucoup à faire. A l'absence de la femme, l'auteur a appelé ma fille à sa maison pour lui apporter de l'eau à boire ensuite il l'a suivie. Il lui a bandé la bouche pour l'empêcher de crier, lui a enlevé le slip et il a forcé son organe. Après il était parti au travail, à la position militaire. Quand sa femme était retournée du marché, elle a retrouvé ma fille sur le sol avec du sang aux parties intime, elle n'arrivait plus à parler.

La femme de l'auteur m'a appelée et je suis vite partie voir ma fille. Sans tarder nous avons amené ma fille dans le centre hospitalier, chez les Catholiques. Le constat était que ma fille a été violée. L'auteur était un militaire du 341ème bataillon spécial avec leur quartier général à Luvungi.

Nous avons signalé l'incident au commandant bataillon, au Bureau conjoint des Nations unies pour les droits de l'homme à Uvira, à la société civile et à la police. Le Bureau de droit de l'homme nous a orienté à la clinique juridique de Luvungi, pour une orientation à avoir accès à la justice, pour porter plainte et pour la prise en charge psychologique. Ma fille a été évacuée à la Fondation Panzi pour des soins appropriés.

Dans mon village, c'était vraiment un sujet à la une. On disait que moi, la maman, je n'avais plus à dire à mes voisins et que l'enfant ne pouvait plus continuer ses études. Elle était devenue un sujet de moqueries par ses amis. Au point que je l'ai envoyée à Uvira chez sa grand-mère. Je n'oserai plus faire confiance à qui que ce soit pour confier mes enfants.

Ma fille a eu accès aux services médicaux et juridiques. L'auteur a été condamné par le tribunal militaire de garnison d'Uvira mais nous n'avons pas été indemnisés jusqu'à ce jour. Les coûts avaient été pris en charge par la clinique juridique.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR DES CONSEILLERS EN PROTECTION DES FEMMES (WPA PAR SON ACRONYME ANGLAIS) ET DES OFFICIERS DES DROITS DE L'HOMME DU BUREAU CONJOINT DES NATIONS UNIES POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME

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UN Photo | Sylvain Liechti

Je m'appelle Joséphine, je suis âgée de 26 ans et je suis veuve. J'habite Lemera dans le territoire d'Uvira. En date du 08/09/2020, j'étais endormie chez moi avec mes enfants. Vers 21h, un homme avait forcé la porte et avait fait incursion dans la maison. Il m'a obligée de déplacer les enfants dans la cuisine parce qu'ils dormaient avec moi dans la chambre. Il m'a bandé la bouche et ligoté les mains à l'aide de mon foulard et mon pagne. Nue, il m'a obligée de sortir de la maison et m'a entrainée à quelques 500 mètres de chez moi, dans un lieu inhabité. Il a abusé sexuellement de moi toute la nuit et m'avait libérée le matin vers 4h quand, au loin nous avions entendu des gens alertés par mes enfants, et venus à ma recherche. Il y avait deux militaires FARDC qui les accompagnaient.

Le matin, j'avais constaté que l'auteur était un militaire car il avait récupéré son arme et sa tenue sur le lieu de l'incident. J'ai signalé l'incident au commandant régiment sur place à Lemera, à l'hôpital et au point focal de droit de l'homme à Uvira. Celui-ci a relayé l'information au bureau de droit de l'homme à Uvira. Directement, une femme du bureau des droits de l'homme m'avait appelée pour faire le suivi. Elle avait demandé au commandant régiment de retrouver le soldat pour le traduire en justice. Le bureau de droit de l'homme à Uvira nous a beaucoup aidé. Ici, chez nous, s'il se passe quelque chose de mal si vous appelez le bureau de droit de l'homme les soldats ont peur. Il y a juste les Mai-Mai ou bien les FNLs ou il y a impunité. Comme je ne suis pas mariée, tout le monde disait que j'avais un rendez-vous avec l'auteur.

J'ai eu accès aux soins. L'auteur était condamné, mais je n'ai pas été indemnisé jusqu'à ce jour. J'ai quitté le village pour aller vivre à Sange.

Je m'appelle Zaina, j'ai 46 ans, je suis mariée et je suis mère de 11 enfants. Je vis à Nyalubemba, dans le territoire de Shabunda, province du Sud-Kivu. C'était un jour d'octobre 2020, à 10h du matin, je me rendais aux champs à 7 km de mon village, seule. Une fois au champ, une heure s'est écoulée, et pendant que je prenais une pause, un homme armé est arrivé. J'ai eu tellement peur que j'ai tenté de fuir. Il m'a vite rattrapée, m'a giflée et je suis tombée par terre. J'ai eu beau crier, mais personne ne pouvait m'entendre, tellement nous étions éloignés. J'avais très peur, il avait trop bu de l'alcool, il ne cessait de pointer son arme sur moi, il m'a ligoté les bras. Il m'a déshabillée et m'a violée. Il l'a fait à trois reprises. J'ai saigné. Il a allumé une cigarette, m'a forcée à fumer.

A la maison, tout le monde s'inquiétait déjà parce que j'avais largement dépassé l'heure à laquelle j'avais l'habitude de rentrer, et j'avais un bébé de cinq mois. Mon mari a pris avec lui deux de ses frères et un des miens pour venir me chercher. Arrivés aux champs, ils ont aperçu de loin que j'étais couchée au sol, avec un monsieur assis près de moi qui fumait. Ils ont crié au monsieur en demandant qui il était. Le monsieur a répondu en brandissant son arme, qu'il était l'homme qui allait tuer la femme couchée au sol si ces messieurs ne se rapprochaient pas. En entendant cela, mon mari a vite compris que c'était un membre du groupe armé actif dans notre village. Ils se sont rapprochés du lieu de la scène. Il était presque 18h du soir. L'homme armé leur a exigé de l'argent pour me libérer. Quand mon mari a répondu qu'ils sont venus sans argent, le monsieur a pointé son arme sur moi et a crié qu'il allait nous tuer si l'argent ne lui était pas remis au plus vite. Le bourreau a accordé que mon beau-frère passe un coup de fil pour qu'on lui apporte de l'argent, soi-disant pour l'achat d'une parcelle. D'autres membres de la famille de mon mari sont arrivés avec 300$. C'était l'argent de mon père, qui était exploitant minier et revendeur des produits des champs. Le bourreau a pris l'argent, m'a donné un coup de pied et a commencé à marcher toujours son arme pointée sur nous. Il a nous a demandé de fermer nos bouches, sinon il nous tuerait un à un. Il a disparu et mon mari s'est alors avancé vers moi. Je pleurais. Mon mari et un de ses frères m'ont soutenue et nous sommes rentrés. Je n'ai rien dit à ce moment-là sur le viol. Il était déjà 8h du soir. Les membres de ma famille nous attendaient. Je ne pouvais même pas les regarder en face. J'avais honte, je me sentais souillée. C'est le lendemain que nous avons appris que c'était un élément du groupe armé Raia Mutomboki.

La première personne à qui j'avais parlé du viol était mon mari. J'avais très peur qu'il me répudie. Dans notre culture, le viol peut être une raison pour qu'un homme répudie sa femme. Il était le seul en qui j'avais confiance. Sa sœur avait subi les mêmes faits et mon mari avait directement assisté au drame, il y avait quelques années quand les FDLR étaient encore là. Je ne pouvais pas aller à la police car ils m'auraient exigée de l'argent, et le bourreau nous avait menacé de nous tuer si on en parlait.

J'ai demandé à mon mari de m'accompagner au centre de santé. J'étais encore dans le délai de 72h. Mon mari m'a demandé si j'étais sûre que le personnel médical n'allait pas répandre la nouvelle. Je lui ai dit que c'était préférable d'aller au centre de santé. Une fois arrivés, l'infirmier nous a informés qu'il n'y avait plus de Kit PEP. Il nous a référé vers le centre hospitalier, une structure à Kigulube centre, appuyée par le Bureau Conjoint des Nations Unies pour les Droits de l'Homme (BCNUDH), à une trentaine de km de mon village. C'était loin, et dans mon état, je ne savais pas si j'allais m'en sortir. Nous sommes partis à Kigulube, avec mon bébé, et ma fille n'arrêtait pas de me demander de quoi je souffrais. Je ne pouvais rien répondre. Nous sommes arrivés au centre hospitalier, après une nuit passée en route. L'infirmier nous a expliqué les services disponibles dont la prise en charge médicale, psychosociale et il nous a informés d'une clinique juridique non loin de là. J'ai même pris un rendez-vous avec le psychologue clinicien. Nous avons été obligés de passer la nuit à Kigulube centre pour pouvoir aller à la clinique juridique, mais notre séjour a été pris en charge par la clinique juridique. Mon mari ne m'a pas rejetée, mais ma propre famille m'a repoussée, car nous n'arrivions pas à liquider la dette des 300$ payés pour ma libération. Quelques semaines après, nous avons recontacté la clinique juridique et nous avons pris la décision de participer aux enquêtes judiciaires envisagées. Mon mari et moi avons gardé ce secret sur le viol. J'ai finalement été auditionnée par un magistrat militaire et j'ai espoir qu'un jour tous ces bourreaux feront face à la justice. A part les 300$ payés au bourreau pour ma libération et quelques frais de séjour dépensés lors de notre voyage à Kigulube, je n'ai payé aucun frais ni pour accéder aux soins médicaux, ni pour l'assistance psychosociale, ni pour l'accompagnement juridique. Dans notre village il n'y avait aucun militaire à cette époque-là. Il n'y avait que deux policiers avec un seule arme. Ce qui n'était pas assez sécurisant, surtout pour aller cultiver aux champs. Le groupe armé fait la loi.

La COVID-19 est un frein dans mon village. Avec les restrictions de mouvement, mon mari ne peut plus aller chercher de la farine au Rwanda pour la survie de notre famille. Cette activité marchait déjà et j'avais espoir qu'on allait enfin liquider la dette de mon père.

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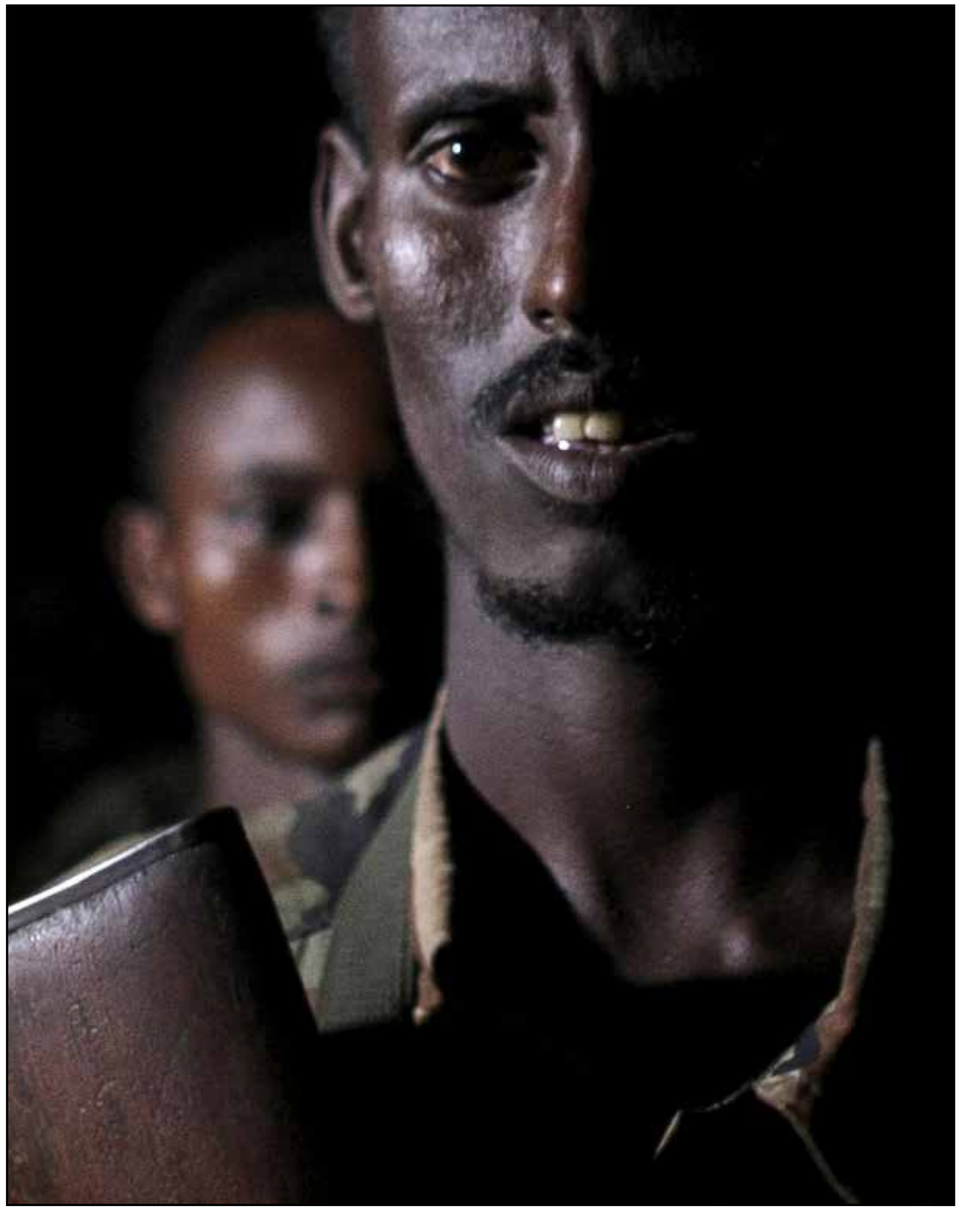

UN Photo | Sylvain Liechti

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Mon prénom est Ange, je suis âgée de 17 ans. Je vis à Nzovu, groupement Bamuguba-Sud, dans le territoire de Shabunda, province du Sud-Kivu, en RDC. J'ai été victime de viol quand j'avais 16 ans. C'était dans ma propre maison, en septembre 2019, par un élément de la police locale qui venait arrêter mon père, soi-disant pour une affaire de dette et de conflit foncier. Je me préparais pour aller à l'école de l'après-midi et soudain je l'ai entendu frapper à la porte de la maison. Je suis sortie habillée en pagne et en singlet. Il m'a demandé si mon père était là et j'ai dit que non, qu'il était aux champs. Il m'a alors demandé si j'étais seule et j'ai dit que oui. Il m'a dit qu'il venait arrêter mon père mais que si je faisais ce qu'il me demandait, il n'arriverait plus rien à mon père. J'ai dit que je ne savais pas de quoi il parlait et que je ne pouvais rien faire pour lui. Il m'a alors giflée à deux reprises, disant que j'étais impolie et que cela me coûterait cher. Pendant que je tentais de rentrer dans la chambre, il m'a suivie, m'a attrapée et plaquée au sol. Il m'a violée, il m'a volée ma virginité. J'ai commencé à crier, mais il tentait de fermer ma bouche avec sa main. Il sentait tellement l'alcool et l'odeur était insupportable. J'ai réussi à dégager sa main de ma bouche et ma voix est sortie. Une dame qui passait a entendu ma voix. Ella a aussi crié au secours et deux hommes se sont joints à elle pour venir voir ce qui se passait dans la maison. Ils ont surpris le policier dans son sale boulot. Ils l'ont attrapé et m'ont libérée de lui. Je pleurais, j'avais mal. Les deux hommes l'ont battu et la dame m'a aidée à me relever. Elle m'a acheminée au centre de santé très vite mais il n'y avait pas de Kit PEP, ni de psychologue. Comme je ne pouvais pas marcher, je suis restée au centre de santé pendant que la dame est sortie chercher de l'aide. Entre temps, le policier a été acheminé devant son chef par les habitants de mon village. Il a été mis aux arrêts et quelques jours après, transféré à Bukavu, à l'auditorat militaire. Mais depuis, je n'ai pas eu des nouvelles sur son sort. La dame est revenue avec ma mère et mon père au centre de santé. Je ne faisais que pleurer et ma mère me voyant, a aussi commencé à pleurer. J'ai été acheminé à 20 km de mon village pour des soins mais là aussi, il y avait rupture de Kit PEP. Ce n'est qu'après cinq jours que nous avons réussi à atteindre un centre hospitalier où il ne restait que deux Kit PEP. Mais apparemment c'était trop tard. Un mois plus tard, comme je ne voyais pas apparaître mes règles, j'en ai parlé à ma mère. Mais comme ma mère ne connaissait pas qu'il y avait de test de grossesse, elle m'a dit de patienter. Je commençais à avoir des nausées, des vomissements. Ma mère m'a dit que probablement j'étais enceinte. J'avais très mal, j'ai eu envie de me faire avorter mais après réflexion avec ma mère, j'ai décidé de garder le bébé. Mon père lui, voulait que je me fasse avorter. Au 7ème mois de ma grossesse, mon père a été tué lors d'une incursion des groupes armés dans mon village. J'ai aussi perdu deux frères lors de cette incursion. Nous sommes alors restés à quatre dans ma famille avec ma mère.

Neuf mois après, j'ai eu l'enfant, de sexe masculin par césarienne. Je suis restée à l'hôpital pendant deux mois par manque de moyens pour payer la maternité. Depuis, j'ai abandonné les études, je souffre pour faire nourrir cet enfant. L'année passée, j'ai perdu ma mère suite d'une longue maladie. Je suis venue à la clinique juridique pour porter plainte contre ce policier. J'espère qu'il sera retrouvé et paiera pour tout ce qu'il m'a fait. Je ne souhaite pas que cet enfant sache qui est son vrai père. Je le considère comme un monstre. J'ai parlé avec un psychologue clinicien mais je ne suis vraiment pas prête à lui accorder mon pardon. Ce qu'il m'a fait est monstrueux. Et s'il n'a pas été inquiété par la justice, je regrette vraiment que je sois née dans ce pays. A cause de cet acte, mes amies ne me fréquentent plus, je me sens seule. Même mes propres sœurs ne prennent pas soin de moi. Mon enfant et moi avons de cheveux jaunes à cause de la malnutrition.

J'ai toujours pensé que la police et l'armée nationale étaient présentes dans nos villages pour nous protéger et assurer notre sécurité. Mais avec ce que j'ai subi, je ne vois aucune différence entre eux et les groupes armés qui ont tués mon père et mes deux frères. Ils tracassent la population, violent les filles et les femmes, violent constamment nos droits. Je souhaite vivement que la justice fonctionne comme il faut dans ce pays. Peut-être que cela pourra réduire la criminalité dans nos villages et, s'il y a des bourreaux qui sont jugés, cela servira d'exemple pour les autres. Mon impression est que l'Etat ne nous protège pas suffisamment contre les abus et les violations de nos droits, en tant que citoyen. J'avais des ambitions de devenir enseignante, mais maintenant je n'étudie plus, mon rêve s'est juste effacé. Je n'ai personne à qui confier mon enfant même si je voulais reprendre mes études.

Avec COVID-19, j'ai peur que les écoles ferment encore et que je ne sois pas capable de reprendre mes études, car je compte reprendre l'année prochaine. En attendant, je vais continuer à cultiver nos champs pour subvenir aux besoins de mon enfant. Je ne peux pas aller vendre mes produits hors de Shabunda, avec toutes ces restrictions de mouvement.

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Gender constructs | Art work by Maria Joao Dolan

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Je réponds au nom de Papy, je suis âgé de 31 ans. Je vis à Nzovu, groupement Bamuguba-Sud, dans le territoire de Shabunda, province du Sud-Kivu, en RDC. Le 23 mars 2018 j'ai subi des actes odieux qui m'ont rendu inapte jusqu'au jour d'aujourd'hui. Avec ma femme, je me rendais au marché pour me procurer des marchandises diverses que je vendais dans mon village. En cours de route, un groupe armé avait attaqué un village par lequel nous passions pour nous rendre au marché. Nous sommes tombés sur des hommes armés, membres de ce groupe très actif dans la zone. Ils étaient une dizaine, avec leur chef autoproclamé « Général ».

Ils nous ont demandé de nous arrêter et de leur donner tout ce que nous avions. J'avais sur moi un équivalent de 400$ en Franc Congolais. C'était tout notre capital. Ils ont tout pris. Leur chef a amené ma femme, un peu à l'écart, il l'a violée, pendant que le reste du groupe me violait aussi. J'ai même subi des mutilations sexuelles lorsque j'avais tenté de me débattre pour aller libérer ma femme. Au-delà, du viol, j'ai été torturé, au point que j'avais perdu connaissance. Croyant m'avoir achevé, les assaillants m'ont laissé au sol, gisant dans mon sang. Je ne pouvais bouger. Après avoir été violée, déshabillée, abandonnée nue, ma femme a été libérée et m'a trouvé au sol, presque mort. Elle a crié au secours mais personne ne pouvait l'entendre, car tout le monde était préoccupé à fuir les assaillants. Je me suis réveillé quelques heures plus tard mais j'avais très mal partout. J'étais gravement blessé. Comme je ne pouvais pas me lever et ma femme était toute nue, elle m'a soulevé, a enlevé ma chemise qu'elle a porté. Elle est restée à côté de moi quelques heures. Puis les assaillants sont revenus et l'ont amené, comme porteuse de tout ce qu'ils avaient pillé dans le village. Je ne pouvais rien faire avec mes blessures, je me sentais très faible. Ma femme criait à l'aide mais personne ne l'entendait. J'ai réussi à me relever tard dans la soirée car il avait commencé à pleuvoir. Je me suis trainé jusqu'à une case abandonnée dont les propriétaires avaient pris fuite. J'y suis resté deux jours, sans nouvelle de ma femme, sans soins médicaux. J'étais très inquiet pour ma femme, et pour ma santé. Le 3ème jour, un habitant passait et a trouvé la case ouverte, il y est entré et m'a trouvé. Il m'a demandé de venir avec lui au centre de santé pour mes blessures, mais le centre de santé était vide, les infirmiers avaient aussi pris fuite à cause de l'attaque. Comme il avait un téléphone sur lui, il a essayé d'appeler l'infirmier, qui heureusement a décroché et a demandé qu'on le rejoigne à 3 km de là, lieu où il s'était réfugié pendant les attaques. En cours de route, je lui demandais s'il avait les nouvelles d'une femme enlevée par les assaillants, il m'a appris que sa femme avait aussi été enlevée et 15 autres femmes du village vers une destination inconnue. Elles étaient utilisées comme porteuses et que le chef du village avec son conseil, était à la recherche des personnes enlevées. Je m'inquiétais davantage, ma femme et moi n'avions que six mois de mariage lorsque cela nous est arrivé. A la vue de la gravité de mes blessures, l'infirmier a dit qu'il ne pouvait que me donner des soins d'urgence, mais que je devais aller dans un hôpital à 20 km du village pour des soins appropriés. J'ai dit que je ne pouvais pas partir sans avoir les nouvelles de ma femme. Je suis resté chez l'infirmier sept jours et on n'avait toujours pas de nouvelles.

Au 8ème jour, les femmes enlevées sont rentrées au village, ma femme y compris. Elle avait tellement maigri. Elle m'a raconté qu'elle avait été violée chaque jour par au moins cinq hommes, qu'elle devait puiser de l'eau, préparer le repas pour eux, faire la lessive et autres travaux. Elles ont été libérées car le groupe avait appris qu'il était recherché par l'armée nationale, prenant fuite la nuit pendant que les femmes dormaient. Elle a aussi bénéficié des soins chez l'infirmier. Dans notre village, les familles s'inquiétaient déjà. Nous avons demandé qu'un messager apporte le message que nous allons à l'hôpital pour des soins. Deux jours après, nous étions à l'hôpital, et les membres de nos familles nous y ont rejoints. Nous sommes restés six mois à l'hôpital, ou j'ai subi une intervention chirurgicale. Une année après, nous avons participé au processus judiciaire appuyé par le BCNUDH, à l'issu duquel, le chef et quelques membres du groupe armé ont été condamnés en 2019. Ma femme et moi voyons un psychologue mais le traumatisme a été tellement violent. Nous n'avons pas été dédommagés, mais le seul fait de savoir que ces assaillants sont en prison est un soulagement pour nous. La seule peur pour nous est, s'ils connaissaient nos identités, ils pourraient nous faire du mal à travers leurs autres alliés restés au village. Nous n'avons pas eu d'enfants jusqu'à présent. Je pense que c'est à cause de ce que j'ai subi. Je ne peux plus toucher ma femme, je n'ai pas de force. J'ai un mal permanent au dos. Je ne peux plus faire aucun travail lourd, même aller aux champs. Au village, j'ai l'impression que les gens savent ce qui nous est arrivé, même si on n'en a jamais parlé. Parfois quand je passe, j'ai tendance à croire que les gens parlent de moi, qu'ils se moquent parce que je ne travaille plus. Seule ma femme continue un petit commerce au village, et qui permet de subvenir à nos besoins.

Avec COVID-19, nous ne pouvions plus voir notre psychologue à cause de restrictions, et nous n'avions pas de téléphone pour rester en communication avec lui. Or, ses conseils nous aident à reprendre les forces et confiance en nous-même.

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Je suis Solange, j'ai 54 ans, je vis à Bunia mais je suis venue de Fataki, dans le territoire de Djugu, en Ituri. Je suis de la communauté Hema, veuve avec cinq enfants. Je suis à Bunia comme personne déplacée interne.

Ce problème-là de viol, qui m'est arrivé et m'a détruit les organes génitaux. C'était le 17 juillet 2019 vers 15h, que j'ai été violée. C'était vers le grand séminaire. Les enfants ont tellement souffert de faim, donc je suis allée au village leur chercher à manger. Pendant que je travaillais au champ, un monsieur muni d'un fusil et d'un couteau était caché dans un buisson à côté. Je ne l'avais pas encore vu. Lorsque je rentrais à la maison le soir vers 17h, j'étais en cours de route pour la maison en passant par la voie de la brousse. Je voulais rejoindre mes enfants, soudain, deux coups de poing m'ont été assénés au visage. J'ai crié en demandant « Qu'est-ce qu'il y a? Au secours !!! ». Immédiatement, il m'a donné un autre coup de poing au visage, en me projetant par terre, je suis tombée sans aucune force pour me relever. Au moment où je suis tombé, j'ai vu le monsieur avec un fusil et un couteau, il m'a retirée violemment ma houe, et m'a transpercée avec son couteau, sur trois parties de mes bras. Il disait « Tu dois me satisfaire puis je vais te tuer ». Avec toutes les douleurs, je me suis sentie complètement affaiblie, je saignais, mais le monsieur m'a impitoyablement violée. Pendant le viol, je suis restée évanouie, je ne ressentais ni n'entendais plus rien dans mes oreilles. J'ai totalement perdu connaissance. Je n'ai pas tout de suite réalisé que je saignais aux deux bras et à la tête.

Il était presque 18h passées, mes enfants sont venus à ma recherche et ils m'ont retrouvée sans force, ayant perdu connaissance, nue et étendue dans la brousse. Dépassés, les enfants n'ont pas su où m'emmener, ayant cru que j'étais morte. Ils m'ont pris jusqu'au centre de santé (près du site des déplacés) en sanglotant pensant que j'étais déjà morte et disaient « Papa est mort et maman vient de mourir, qu'allons-nous devenir ? ». Ces mêmes enfants ont pris l'initiative d'appeler l'assistante psycho-sociale de l'ONG qui a immédiatement accouru. Cette dernière m'a trouvée au centre de santé, couverte de sang partout.

C'est au centre de santé que je me suis rendu compte que j'avais reçu des blessures de couteau à plusieurs endroits du corps. Les zones du secteur des Walendu Djatsi sont contrôlées par les assaillants de la Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO). Ces derniers sont toujours munis de machette ou couteau et d'une arme à feu et sont hostiles aux Hema. C'est pourquoi qu'ils tuent nos maris et nous violent. Tous les secteurs des Walendu (Djatsi, Tatsi, Pitsi, Watsi) sont actuellement sous la domination des assaillants de CODECO. C'est donc un assaillant de CODECO qui m'a violée.

Je confirme avoir été correctement prise en charge pendant que j'étais dans une situation même d'inconscience. Je remercie le médecin qui m'a soignée et je dis merci également à l'assistante psychosociale et au psychologue de l'ONG qui m'ont beaucoup aidée. Aujourd'hui je me sens plus ou moins bien pour avoir retrouvée mes enfants. L'appui psychologique que j'ai reçu m'a permis de comprendre la vie. Nous sommes plusieurs femmes qui avons subi ce genre d'actes ignobles. Certaines ne veulent pas le dire, mais je n'ai pas été discriminée parmi les miens. J'ai reçu les soins médicaux et j'ai également reçu l'assistance psychologique et l'exercice de détraumatisation par les psychologues. Ces services m'ont été rendus par l'ONG à Bunia.

Je n'ai pas encore eu accès à la justice. Je voudrais que des jeunes gens qui manquent le respect à l'égard de leurs mamans puissent être sévèrement punis par la loi. Je suis prête à participer à la justice. Je n'ai aucun moyen pour saisir la justice. Nous sommes des milliers des femmes qui avons subi ce genre d'actes. Nos maris ont été décapité à la machette mais, à ce jour, aucune justice n'a été rendue. Je ne sais pas dire quoique ce soit sur comment prévenir, je demande à l'Etat Congolais de veiller à la protection des civils.

Photo | Dieudonné Dirole for Fondation Carmignac

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR DES CONSEILLERS EN PROTECTION DES FEMMES (WPA PAR SON ACRONYME ANGLAIS) ET DES OFFICIERS DES DROITS DE L'HOMME DU BUREAU CONJOINT DES NATIONS UNIES POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME

Tous les noms des participants et participantes ont été modifiés afin de préserver l'anonymat des victimes. Les entretiens ont été conduit en langue locale, puis traduits en français.

Je suis Séraphine, j'ai 26 ans, je viens de Blukwa, dans le territoire de Djugu. Je suis de la communauté Hema et je suis célibataire. Je vis avec mon seul enfant. J'ai subi cet acte ignoble en septembre 2018 à Drodro, à Djugu.

La guerre a éclaté dans la localité de Drodro aux environs de 5h du matin (85 km au Nord-Est de Bunia). Des civils ont été tués en masse par des assaillants. Mes proches parents ont même été tués dans des maisons voisines et dans notre entourage. Par reflexe, j'ai fui avec un groupe de femmes vers l'hôpital de Drodro, où nous sommes allées nous cacher. Nous nous sommes enfermées dans une des chambres de l'hôpital de Drodro. Les assaillants venaient d'assiéger l'hôpital en tuant tout le monde sur leur passage, patients et personnel soignant, même les malades hospitalisés. Les assaillants ont commencé à sortir de l'hôpital croyant qu'ils avaient déjà tué tout le monde, et nous nous étions cachées dans une des chambres de l'hôpital que nous avions trouvée ouverte. Deux des assaillants ont entendu des voix basses dans la chambre où nous étions entassées et s'en sont rapprochés. Ils ont tiré dans la toiture, criant pour que nous ouvrions la chambre immédiatement. Ils ont ainsi réussi à forcer la porte en tirant dans la serrure, la porte a cédé. Nous étions toutes couchées par terre. Ils nous ont intimées l'ordre de nous lever, parce qu'ils venaient nous tuer.

Ils nous ont fait porter les effets pillés dans l'hôpital. L'une des victimes a demandé où nous allions, les assaillants nous ont dit de les suivre. En cours de route, les assaillants buvaient des boissons fortement alcoolisées en nous tendant les fusils et nous menaçant de nous tuer, tout en argumentant que des membres de leurs familles ont été tués par les Hema et que notre tour était venu. C'était une déclaration de fausse vengeance, parce que les Hema ne se sont jamais levés contre les Lendu. Ils nous ont amené très loin dans un bastion des assaillants en territoire Lendu où ces derniers nous ont dit que désormais nous allions devenir leurs femmes.

Le chef des assaillants m'a prise de force disant que je devenais sa femme, et une autre a été prise par un autre chef Lendu du groupe d'assaillants de Loga. L'une des femmes qui s'est opposée aux assaillants avait été mise dans un sac, et ils l'ont frappée à coups de bâtons jusqu'à ce qu'elle meure.

Dans notre groupe de cinq femmes otages des assaillants, il y avait également ma propre maman. Nous avions ainsi passé six mois en captivité, utilisées comme esclaves sexuelles. Nous avons nous toutes porté des grossesses non-désirées des assaillants. Nous nous sommes organisées pour prendre la fuite en mars 2019, lorsque les assaillants sont allés en opérations militaires contre les FARDC. Nous avons eu le transport gratuit dans un camion à Fataki. Ce sont les assaillants de CODECO qui ont leurs camps dans les secteurs des Walendu (Tatsi, Pitsi, Djatsi, Watsi). Aucun Hema n'y vit encore, nos maris ont même été décapités.

Moi je n'avais jamais entendu parler de l'assistance aux victimes de violences sexuelles. Nous avons des enfants qui sont issus de ces viols. Nous continuons à demander à Dieu de nous aider à protéger ces enfants innocents. Mon enfant n'est pas aimé dans la communauté parce qu'il est issu du viol des Lendu. Moi-même, je suis toujours mal vue par mes proches et les autres membres de la communauté Hema. C'est pourquoi j'ai manqué de mari. Je n'ai pas eu de soins médicaux, car je ne savais pas que c'était disponibles. J'ai cependant reçu un appui de détraumatisation par le psychologue de l'ONG.

Je n'ai jamais déclaré ce qui m'est arrivé aux instances judiciaires. Je ne connais pas où se trouve la justice, je ne connais aucun magistrat. Je n'ai jamais engagé de procès, je n'ai jamais rien dit aux autorités.

Photo | Flicker

Je suis Félicien, j'ai 69 ans, je viens de Limbu, groupement Tchele, (plus ou moins 140 km au Nord-Est de Bunia), dans le territoire de Djugu. Je suis marié et j'avais 12 enfants, mais ils ne me restent que cinq, les autres sont décédés au cours de la guerre.

J'ai été pris par les assaillants le 26 décembre 2019 et c'est le même jour que deux femmes assaillantes m'ont été données par leur chef pour les satisfaire sexuellement.

J'avais appris la nouvelle du décès d'un proche parent en collectivité des Bahema Nord. J'avais ainsi décidé de m'y rendre et je suis resté dans la maison où se tenait le deuil. Le 26 décembre 2019, pendant la nuit aux environs de 23h, des assaillants sont arrivés là-bas, au lieu du deuil. Ils ont tué trois personnes sur place, les décapitant avec la machette. Ils m'ont pris pour transporter leurs bagages et d'autres biens jusqu'à très loin dans la vallée de Aka, en secteur de Walendu Pitsi (plus ou moins 130 km au Nord-Est de Bunia). En cours de route, ils me menaçaient de mort. C'est là, dans la vallée d'Aka, qu'ils avaient aménagé leur camp. Ils me disaient que j'étais fort physiquement et que je pouvais satisfaire des femmes assaillantes. Je me taisais et ne disais rien de crainte d'être tué comme les trois hommes. Le même jour, quand nous sommes arrivés dans le camp aux environs de 1h du matin, les assaillants m'ont apporté deux femmes assaillantes armées et m'ont forcé de coucher avec elles devant tout le monde, au risque que je sois tué. Par crainte de la mort, je l'ai fait. Cela a continué comme une scène de théâtre toute la journée du 27 décembre 2019, pendant même que j'étais déjà affaibli et par le voyage, et par des menaces de mort, et par le traumatisme dû à la décapitation de trois hommes, et par la mort de mon parent proche chez qui j'étais au deuil quand les assaillants armés m'ont pris.

Le lendemain matin, soit le 28 décembre 2019 aux environs de 5h, les deux femmes assaillantes m'ont apporté des pommes de terre cuites en me disant que c'était ma provision pour la route. J'avais juste des morceaux de vêtements, j'étais presque nu. Elles m'ont dit de manger les pommes de terre si j'avais faim en cours de route. J'avais toujours peur et je ne portais plus d'habits puisqu'ils avaient déchiré ça. Elles m'ont même montré la voie à suivre jusqu'à Dhedja. Arrivé à Dhedja, une femme m'a vu dans cet état anormal, étant presque nu. Elle a voulu fuir, mais je lui ai dit de ne pas fuir, je suis une personne normale qui a subi des violences sexuelles par des femmes armées. La femme est revenue m'écouter et a compris que je ne pouvais pas lui nuire. Immédiatement elle est allée appeler un homme qui m'a reconnu et m'a apporté des vêtements. Je suis resté chez cet homme pendant trois jours, jusqu'au moment où j'ai trouvé un taxi qui m'a pris jusqu'à Bunia le 02 janvier 2020.

J'avoue par ailleurs avoir assisté à d'autres scènes de violences sexuelles imposée par des assaillants armés à des femmes Hema et à un homme Hema. C'est notamment le cas de Germain à qui des assaillants ont imposé une femme assaillante au risque d'être tué à Tchéle, plus ou moins 140 km au Nord-Est de Bunia (collectivité des Ndo-Okebo, territoire de Djugu). Arrivé au site des personnes déplacées internes (PDI), le chef de site m'a demandé de me confier à lui sur tout ce qui m'était arrivé, pour qu'il sache si la sécurité est revenue à Djugu. Je lui ai relaté mon récit. Il en a parlé à son tour à l'assistante psycho-sociale. J'ai reçu une assistance psychologique et l'exercice de dé-traumatisation de la part des psychologues de l'ONG immédiatement et avec respect.

Depuis les gens ont su que j'étais violé plusieurs fois par des femmes Lendu qui portaient des armes, tout le monde a commencé à me déconsidérer et je vis dans un retrait total. Parfois les hommes et les femmes du site se moquent de moi en disant que je suis le mari des assaillantes de CODECO. Je n'ai reçu aucun service, à part l'assistance psychologique qui m'est apportée par le psychologue de l'ONG. Je ne sais pas si les magistrats connaissent mon cas. Je ne sais pas quelle prévention, puisque la guerre et les viols continuent dans le territoire de Djugu.

UN Photo | Abel Kavanagh

TÉMOIGNAGES DU TANGANYIKA

Je suis Sophie, j'ai 25 ans, je suis de Lwama, dans le territoire de Kalemie. C'était en août 2017. De retour de Lwama, j'étais accompagnée de mon petit-frère et nous avons rencontré des militaires FARDC du 222ème bataillon, campés au bord de la rivière Lwama. Ils nous ont demandé de l'eau à boire. À ce moment-là, deux militaires ont retiré mon petit frère pour le garder dans une des huttes de leur petit camp de cantonnement. Quatre autres militaires m'ont emmenée dans une autre hutte où ils m'ont violée l'un après l'autre.

Ce jour-là, je m'en suis sentie humiliée, vexée et qu'on m'avait dérobée de ma dignité. J'ai signalé l'incident un mois plus tard au BCNUDH, j'étais accompagnée de mes parents. Il faut dire qu'au niveau de ma famille, tout comme auprès de mon mari, je ne pense pas avoir ressentie de la stigmatisation. Toutefois, j'ai reçu des soins de santé tardivement en raison de la distance qui me séparait du centre hospitalier.

Également, j'ai reçu un soutien psychosocial à travers une ONG locale et j'ai été accompagnée par le Bureau Conjoint des Nations Unies pour les Droits de l'Homme (BCNUDH) auprès de l'auditorat militaire où un dossier a été ouvert. Tout était gratuit à l'exception des frais de 10 USD pour se constituer partie civile. Au cours de l'instruction du dossier à l'auditorat, deux des présumés auteurs ont été déchargés et qu'au tribunal, un jugement a été rendu acquittant les deux autres présumés auteurs. Je n'ai reçu aucun dédommagement.

Je suis déçue car si j'avais pu savoir avant la finalité du procès, j'aurais accepté l'arrangement à l'amiable que m'avaient proposée ces agresseurs. Je dirai qu'il faudrait rétablir l'autorité de l'Etat et déployer des unités de la police dans les zones reculées, afin d'assurer la protection de la population et de leurs biens. L'incident s'est produit avant l'avènement du Covid-19, je ne ressens pas un impact personnellement. Toutefois, la pandémie a eu plus d'impacts négatifs suite à la restriction de mouvement de la population d'une zone à une autre, et aussi la restriction de certains services (service minimum dans certaines structures médicales, ONG, services étatiques).

UN Photo | Sylvain Liechti

Je suis Caroline, j'ai 26 ans et je suis d'un village proche de Mulange. L'incident a eu lieu en février 2020. Je suis venue au sous-commissariat de la PNC de Mulange (18 km au Sud de Kalemie), pour visiter mon mari et mon beau-père, arrêtés la veille suite à une querelle en famille. C'est ainsi que le commandant de la PNC en place, vers 18h, m'a pris en retrait en m'amenant dans son bureau et m'a promis de libérer mon mari et mon beau-père, si j'acceptais en retour d'avoir une relation sexuelle avec lui. J'étais hésitante, mais j'ai vu le commandant se lever et fermer la porte. Ensuite, il m'a arraché mes vêtements et m'a forcée la relation. J'ai signalé l'incident aux membres de ma communauté (Twa). Les leaders ont contacté le BCNUDH pour référencement en justice. Le signalement a été fait environ deux semaines après l'acte car le policier présumé auteur a essayé d'arranger l'affaire à l'amiable. Au courant de ces deux semaines, le policier en question a disparu. Moi et ma famille avons été discriminées parce que nous sommes Twa. Je n'ai pas pu être accueillie au centre de santé car je suis Twa. Je me suis sentie humiliée par la communauté Luba. Également, les autorités locales n'ont pas voulu que les gens sachent que j'ai été violée par leurs frères ni portée devant la justice. Ils ont dit qu'ils allaient chasser toute ma famille de la zone si jamais le secret était dévoilé. De plus, des frais d'ouverture du dossier à l'auditorat pour émettre un mandat de recherche ont été exigés, cela m'a découragé.

Le BCNUDH est intervenu et je n'ai finalement rien payé. Devant la justice militaire, le dossier n'a pas été pris en considération malgré l'appui du BCNUDH, à travers une clinique juridique. Je vis dans le regret à cause de la stigmatisation et la non-considération de mon dossier par la justice, sous prétexte que le présumé auteur est en cavale. Je tiens encore à obtenir justice, et je voudrais que, dans la mesure du possible, mon dossier soit ouvert au tribunal et qu'il arrive à sa conclusion.

Il faudrait de la sensibilisation auprès des hommes en uniforme (FARDC et PNC) sur la bonne conduite et surtout sur le respect de la dignité de la femme. Il faudrait aussi sensibiliser la population en général et les femmes en particulier sur les mesures de mitigation des risques de viol dans leurs communautés.

La pandémie de Covid-19 m'empêche de faire pression auprès des autorités judiciaires en raison des restrictions des mouvements, services minimums et non accueil des visiteurs dans des bureaux.

Je suis Odette et je suis la mère de la victime. Je suis une femme appartenant à la 61ème brigade et qui à l'époque avait été déployée avec d'autres militaires de son unité au village Shibukumba. Je m'y étais rendu avec ma fille en décembre 2015, alors âgée de 7 ans. À la veille des fêtes de fin d'année, je suis rentrée au commandement de l'unité à Bendera (124 km Nord de Kalemie). J'ai dû laisser ma fille avec une collègue femme à notre position militaire à Shibukumba.

En mon absence, ma fille a été plusieurs fois invitée par un militaire et collègue. Celui-ci la violait dans sa caserne plusieurs fois, au point que c'était devenu une habitude. Dans les premiers jours, le violeur avait commencé par des attouchements sexuels puis a continué par éjaculer dans ses cuisses, ensuite à la pénétrer. Même lors de mon retour à Shibukumba, en janvier 2018, le militaire a continué de l'appeler dans sa hutte et de la violer sans que personne ne soit au courant.

C'est dans la nuit du 22 janvier 2018 lorsque je l'avais envoyée payer la farine chez les voisins et que j'ai constaté qu'elle trainait. C'est là que j'ai découvert que le militaire l'avait invitée dans sa maison et je l'ai surpris en train de violer ma fille.

J'ai directement signalé l'incident au commandement de la 61e brigade et celui-ci a invité le BCNUDH pour le suivi du cas. Le BCNUDH, au moment du monitoring a directement référé le cas à une organisation locale de défense des droits de l'homme, pour prise en charge psychologique, orientation médicale et suivi judiciaire. Ma fille a aussi été assistée psychologiquement par une association et elle a été accompagnée à l'hôpital général de référence de Kalemie où elle a reçu des soins médicaux gratuitement. Toutefois, cette prise en charge a eu lieu trois semaines après l'incident en raison de la distance qui nous séparait de Kalemie. Aujourd'hui, Marie toujours mineure, ne semble plus se souvenir de ce qui lui est arrivé il y a plus de cinq ans passés.

Je n'ai pas eu le sentiment que nous ayons été mal traitées ni stigmatisées par notre entourage, ni par notre famille. C'est d'ailleurs la raison pour laquelle j'avais décidé d'amener l'affaire en justice. Lors de la procédure, uniquement 20$ USD a été payé afin que nous puissions constituer en partie civile. Je suis satisfaite de la justice congolaise qui a bien fait son travail en condamnant l'auteur à 20 ans de Servitude Pénale Principale (SPP). Le seul regret est que l'auteur est décédé à la prison centrale de Kalemie deux ans après sa condamnation. Je regrette une seule chose, c'est le fait que les dommages et intérêts alloués à ma fille par le tribunal n'ont pas été payés, et je ne sais pas jusqu'aujourd'hui par quel mécanisme les recouvrer.

Il faudrait sensibiliser les militaires sur les lois congolaises et sur le respect de la femme en général et de la jeune fille en particulier. Il faudrait aussi sensibiliser les jeunes filles sur les menaces surtout de viol qui les guettent dans les différentes communautés où elles vivent.

UN Photo | Sylvain Liechti

TÉMOIGNAGES DU TANGANYIKA

Je suis Geraldine, je suis la mère de Maria. Maria avait 7 ans et vivait avec nous (ses parents) au village Kalonda Kibinda, et là où l'auteur militaire qui l'a violée était affecté par son unité. Ce militaire, étant le fils de mon oncle maternel, a demandé à passer la nuit à la maison. Dans la nuit, vers 1h00 du matin, il a profité de notre sommeil pour s'en prendre à Maria qui dormait dans la même chambre que lui. Après avoir introduit ses doigts dans le sexe de la fille et il a éjaculé entre ses jambes, Maria a crié et je suis venue pour secourir ma fille. Le militaire a remis son sexe dans son pantalon en me disant qu'il voulait simplement sortir pour faire un petit besoin dehors.

L'incident a été signalé au commandant de l'unité sur place qui a arrêté et transféré le militaire à l'auditorat militaire de Kalemie. Le BCNUDH a été saisit du cas et l'a référé à une organisation locale de défense des droits de l'homme, une clinique juridique pour l'accompagnement judiciaire. Ma fille n'a pas été assistée psychologiquement à temps, car ce n'est que deux mois après l'évènement qu'elle a été référée par une association locale. Les soins médicaux aussi n'avaient pas été reçus à temps. C'est par réquisition médicale qu'elle a été en contact avec le médecin. Notre famille a reçu plusieurs menaces après que le militaire a été mis aux arrêts. Cela nous a poussés à déménager de Kalonda Kibinda vers Nyemba centre où nous pouvons vivre en sécurité. Je n'ai pas le sentiment que notre famille a été stigmatisée par leur entourage. Mais Maria avait déjà honte de jouer avec ses camarades du village. Elle me disait de la faire partir du village pour aller vivre ailleurs. Mais à part les quelques menaces venues de certains membres de la famille de l'accusé à la suite de l'arrestation de celui-ci, rien ne nous est arrivé.

La justice a bien fait son travail. La famille n'a eu que 20$USD a payé en frais pour nous constituer en partie civile. A partir du moment où l'auteur a été arrêté et transféré devant la justice, le procès a connu son cours normal et l'auteur a été condamné. Toutefois, j'attends toujours la réception des dommages et intérêts alloués à ma fille par le tribunal. Il faudrait sensibiliser les militaires sur le respect de la femme et les lois réprimant les violences sexuelles afin d'éviter de se faire arrêter régulièrement.

Le COVID-19 nous empêche de continuer de faire le suivi de la décision du tribunal. Dans la vie privée, cela nous empêche de continuer à travailler normalement et à faire les petites activités de commerce.

UN Photo

INFORMATION FACILITATED BY A FRONTLINE RESPONDER SERVICE PROVIDER TO SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

The interviewee wishes to remain anonymous.
Interview conducted by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP)

My name is [anonymous]. I reside and work in Tigray, Ethiopia. I am a psychologist who works as a frontline responder providing psychosocial support to survivors of violence, including sexual violence in conflict. We have been receiving increased reports about conflict-related sexual violence incidents in the community. This morning, I traveled there and met with two patients who are survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

The first survivor is a 45-year-old woman with two children aged 13 and 22. The incident happened in her home, in the middle of the night, when 16 armed Eritrean troops ordered her to open her door. As the soldiers entered the room, she asked them to spare her children. The soldiers allowed the eldest son to hide in her room but ordered the youngest one to watch as the mother was gang raped by all 16 soldiers. The survivor suffered many medical complications and her and her son continue to suffer severe psychological trauma.

The second survivor is a 32-year-old shop owner working from her own home. 14 Eritrean soldiers arrived around 12 PM to order beers. After a few beers, two of the soldiers asked to engage in sexual relations, to which, the survivor responded, "I am not a commercial sex worker." The soldiers quickly became angry, locked the door, and claimed they would not pay her even if she was a sex worker. Despite her screaming for help, she was raped by the 14 soldiers.

These two incidents happened three months ago, where there are no longer Eritrean troops present. I also met with two additional survivors of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by Ethiopian armed troops as recently as 15 days ago. In all but one case, the perpetrators were in uniform. The survivors were not able to report the incidents. The women are too afraid to even travel to receive medical services, out of fear that if the soldiers find out, they could be killed.

Depending on the background of the perpetrator, the survivors face varying degrees of stigma. Survivors who were raped by Eritrean soldiers receive some community support, because locals are angry at the Eritrean army. However, many women still fear stigma and as a result, do not come forward about their experiences.

In incidents where Ethiopian soldiers are the perpetrators, the survivors are often not taken seriously. They often experience victim-blaming and are told things like: "You smiled at them, you were drinking with them, you were asking for it."

I've also met with young women survivors seeking services for safe abortions. On top of the verbal and social stigma they experience, they are also told they will never find a suitable partner for marriage.

Most of the services for the survivors are provided only by local civil society organizations. When incidents are reported below a three-month benchmark, they are referred to midwives who can prescribe them medications and other services. After three months, they are referred to local hospitals. We also provide psychosocial support to the survivors. We also ask the patients if they are comfortable seeing a psychologist and midwife at the same time, so as to avoid having them tell their stories more than one time and risk re-traumatizing them. Other services, such as economic support, are rarely available.

As far as I know, we are the only ones providing these kinds of services to the survivors. Most of the hospitals in the conflict-affected towns are stretched thin, with more than 70% of services not operational, and a severe lack of healthcare workers who have all fled the conflict. In addition to this, roads are blocked, and transportation is not working – all of which limits the survivors' access to services and justice. When it's safe to, they travel 12 km by foot to the main town to reach us.

I don't have a single case or patient who has even tried to access justice through courts or tribunals. I've treated around 280 patients, and a large majority of them are survivors of sexual violence. Most of the incidents are perpetrated by soldiers. As a result, they are too scared to report this to the police.

In terms of prevention and response, we must limit militarized presence, end impunity and strengthen accountability among armed forces and soldiers. Rape must no longer be used as a weapon of war. As a psychologist, frontline responder, and community member, my hope is that healthcare systems are strengthened, especially in rural areas (which only have one-two clinics). We must provide a holistic support to survivors, their children, and their families, and address the physical, social, psychological, and economic impacts of conflict-related sexual violence. We should also put in resources to map out the pervasiveness of this issue, as it continues to be largely unreported.

Whenever I discuss COVID-19 prevention measures with my patients, I often get the same response: "COVID-19 has not been a problem for us in the last six months. What's killing us is the war, and the lack of food. I would rather get COVID-19 than being raped."

Photo | Elena Hermona

TESTIMONIOS CONSEGUIDOS A TRAVÉS DE ONU MUJERES GUATEMALA

Rosalina es una mujer q'eqchi' y tiene 64 años. Nació en uno de los departamentos de Chimaltenango en Guatemala. Pertenece a un pueblo que sufrió en carne propia la violencia política por la guerra. A raiz de esto, tuvo que abandonar su pueblo para salvar su propia vida y trasladarse a otro lugar. Hoy, reside en la cabecera departamental, alejada de su lugar de nacimiento. Relata: La época más dura para las mujeres indígenas y sus familias fueron los años comprendidos entre 1980 y 1985. La violencia hacia las mujeres era generalizada. Algunas mujeres de mi familia sufrieron violencia, pero también violación sexual. Fueron también testigos de secuestros y desapariciones de sus esposos, hijos o padres. Por muchos años fueron obligadas a dar información permanentemente al ejército respecto de sus comunidades. Niñas y mujeres jóvenes, solteras (que generalmente son las primeras hijas de las familias) eran buscadas sistemáticamente por miembros del ejército para ser violadas. La violación sexual afectó por igual a madres solteras, madres embarazadas o abuelas La violación sexual fue una de las formas o instrumento para sembrar el terror, el miedo contra todas las mujeres. Dejó huellas individuales y colectivas en las mujeres.

Muchas mujeres han contado su historia, relatando el efecto profundo que las violaciones han dejado en ellas. Las mujeres guardan celosamente el respeto hacia su condición de mujer indígena y trabajadora, pero el hecho de haber sido violadas desencadenó el miedo permanente en estas ellas, haciendo que no se volvieran a casar, tener novio o pareja. Muchas sufrieron acoso y violencia, delante de sus madres, padres, abuelos y hermanos. Luego, eran asesinados o quemados vivos. Esta forma de violencia impulsada por los soldados y los militares contra las mujeres es algo que dejó muy lastimada la dignidad y el honor de todas las mujeres. En organización Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) calcularon que entre 60 y 85 mil mujeres fueron violentadas en su dignidad.

Esa historia tan dolorosa y condenable contra adolescentes y niñas es hasta hoy un recuerdo de dolor. Aquellas mujeres que hoy son sobrevivientes adultas y han podido casarse no llevan una vida de felicidad. Guardan un secreto que cuando es revelado genera violencia al interior de sus hogares hacia sus cuerpos. En algunos casos, las violaciones fueron actos públicos, sin embargo, y en su gran mayoría, los actos ocurrieron puertas adentro, con testigos de la familia solamente. Esas sobrevivientes han callado por vergüenza. Creemos que esta vergüenza no la deben cargar ellas, sino que debe trasladarse a los perpetradores. Por esta razón es importante trabajar la dignidad y honor de las mujeres. Hablar de la vida íntima con estas mujeres ha sido un proceso lento y difícil. Lo que hoy se sabe es lo mínimo.

El Estado y sus instituciones nunca han tenido una política pública de atención en casos de mujeres que fueron víctimas y sobrevivientes de abuso de violación sexual. Casi todo el trabajo sobre sanación, salud mental, crecimiento personal que se ha hecho con las mujeres fue asumidos por las organizaciones sociales y la iglesia católica. El Estado ha estado ausente. En el programa nacional de resarcimiento que se instaló para atender a familias y sobrevivientes de la violencia se planteó la necesidad de que el Ministerio de Salud asumiera el rol de atención a la salud de las mujeres sobrevivientes. Sin embargo, nunca hubo posibilidad por falta de recursos (personal capacitado) y en algunos casos desde los lugares públicos la

única orientación recibida por las sobrevivientes es la de "tratar de olvidar el pasado". No se puede olvidar un acto que ha lastimado la condición física, emocional, cultural de las mujeres, principalmente de las que pertenecen a los pueblos indígenas que son quienes sufren violencia extrema.

A raíz de la firma de los acuerdos de paz tenemos hoy la ley de dignificación de las mujeres, pero esta ley no abarca específicamente casos de mujeres que sufrieron violencia durante el conflicto armado. No necesariamente la razón de esto es económica, puede haber acciones positivas para abordar el tema, pero no ha habido voluntad política. No hay memoria histórica de funcionarios públicos para asumir la responsabilidad de cara a la situación que viven las mujeres. Miles de mujeres que han sufrido violencia y violación sexual han presentado enfermedades posteriores como diabetes, ceguera, problemas vaginales permanentes, cáncer de mama y del útero y otras enfermedades colaterales. Muchas murieron sin recibir justicia, sin atención específica, sin medicamentos. Por el contrario, se ha notado que cuando han recibido un tipo de atención, sobresalen, superan miedo, insomnio, falta de apetito, anemia y otras enfermedades conexas. Creemos que, por ejemplo, la diabetes se genera por el miedo no comentado, no sanado, el miedo guardado o silenciado. Por eso el trabajo de sanación que se ha logrado con fondos mínimos de la cooperación internacional es tan importante y crucial para una nueva vida dignificada. Muchos proyectos se enfocan al desarrollo y formación, pero pocos se dirigen a las mujeres sobrevivientes de las violaciones sexuales bajo violencia extrema.

En los años ´90 CONAVIGUA atendió y acompañó a 32 mujeres mayas q'eqchi' durante 7 años en juicio. Las mujeres lo hicieron en su idioma, a viva voz y de frente a los tribunales de justicia. Se ganó el juicio, pero solamente se logró la condena porque en ese momento fue todo lo que las mujeres pidieron. En esa ocasión fue condenado uno de los autores materiales, pero también había otros que estaban en el entorno de estos hombres que no fueron alcanzados por la condena. El segundo caso fue el de las mujeres del pueblo Ixil, en que se acusó a Efraín Ríos Montt. Este caso incentivó a las mujeres a señalar culpables y a pedir justicia. Por eso, para mí, el caso Sepur Zarco es un caso ejemplar. No sólo conllevó a hacer las denuncias, señalar autores y justicia sino también demandar reparación. Reparación individual para las mujeres, pero también reparación colectiva para la comunidad.

Photo | Cristina Chiquin

Demecia Yat de Xol es mujer indígena, nació el 15 de octubre de 1955 en el municipio de Senahú. Al casarse se mudó al Caserío La Esperanza, Panzós, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, lugar donde reside actualmente.

Relata: En los años 80, durante la guerra civil que enfrentó Guatemala durante 36 años, fui víctima de violaciones sistemáticas y estuve al servicio de los militares, quienes nos encerraban para abusar sexualmente de mí y mis otras compañeras. Recuerdo que un 25 de agosto se llevaron a mi esposo para asesinarlo porque desde ese día no volví a verlo; mis hijos tenían cinco y tres años. Ese día sentí un dolor que, aunque haya trascurrido el tiempo, no logro superarlo. Como parte del acceso a la justicia deseo encontrar los restos del padre de mis hijos y darle una sepultura digna. En el año 2011 decidimos organizarnos 15 mujeres que fuimos víctimas de violencia sexual, en el Colectivo Jalok´U, para luchar para que nuestras voces fueran escuchadas por el Tribunal de Justicia de Guatemala. En el año 2016 se condenó a dos exmilitares por el delito de violación sexual sistemática y se aplicó la concesión de 18 medidas de reparación. El dictamen a nuestro favor no fue fácil, tuvimos miedos, frío, ausencia de nuestros hijos e hijas, pero también, oportunidades de acompañamiento de CONAVIGUA (Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala), ECAP (Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial), UNAMG (Unión Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas), MTM (Mujeres Transformando el Mundo), ONU Mujeres, la Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos (PDH) y otras organizaciones internacionales. Esto permitió que el Ministerio Público escuchara nuestras voces, ya que los militares nos llamaban "locas", "prostitutas", "mentirosas" lo que nos dio más valor para decir la verdad. Fue dura la lucha para el acceso de la justicia. Nuestra comunidad al principio nos aisló y no creían que lograríamos la justicia. Actualmente nos reconocen como constructoras de paz y existe involucramiento para la resolución de conflictos; sin embargo, para obtener este reconocimiento tuvimos que trabajar duro y con la frente en alto.

En relación con el acceso a los servicios, las organizaciones acompañantes nos brindaron asesoría legal, acompañamiento ante los Tribunales de Justicia, el Ministerio Público y el apoyo psicosocial. También recibimos acompañamiento para exigir la implementación de las 18 medidas que aún hoy es un tema pendiente para el gobierno de Guatemala. "Mujeres Transformando al Mundo" ha coordinado aspectos logísticos durante todo este tiempo, juntamente con otras organizaciones de cooperación, quienes desde el inicio creyeron en mí y en mis compañeras. Nuevamente digo: no fue fácil, pero tuvimos aliadas en el camino, quienes nos respaldaron por decir la verdad como mujeres indígenas rurales. También contamos con cuatro testigos de la comunidad quienes nos acompañaron. Mi experiencia para llegar a los tribunales fue dura porque no sé leer ni escribir; pero mi fuerza por la justicia me mantuvo firme; logrando la sentencia condenatoria de dos militares que nos violaron sistemáticamente. Es muy doloroso para mí volver a recordar estos momentos.

Actualmente, las 18 medidas de reparación están estancadas por el COVID-19. En años anteriores logramos obtener la clínica móvil, la remoción de la escuela y en el 2020 la de nuestras viviendas. Sin embargo, lo más importante y por lo que seguiremos luchando es por alcanzar la certeza jurídica de permanecer en nuestras tierras, ya que es de allí de donde nos alimentamos. Desde el inicio de nuestro camino hasta el día de hoy, hemos tenido apoyo de organizaciones internacionales y sus socias, ellas han cubierto los costos judiciales y de movilización. Nosotras hemos invertido una mínima parte en comparación a lo que las organizaciones acompañantes han invertido desde el principio de nuestro caso hasta las sentencias. Compartir nuestras reflexiones y ejemplo de lucha por el acceso a la justicia es un acto para la prevención; para que evitar que se vuelva a repetir la historia. Aunque ahora, con la tecnología, hay que capacitar a los y las señoritas para que no se pierdan; hay que recuperar valores. La COVID-19 ha limitado el acceso a nuestros derechos de participación, desarrollo económico, ha impactado en nuestra autonomía y nuestras medidas de reparación quedaron estancadas nuevamente. Retomar es un gran reto.

UN Women | Ryan Brown

Las fotos no están asociadas a los testimonios.

TESTIMONIO ANÓNIMO

XXX es mujer indígena de la comunidad achí. Nació en el departamento de Baja Verapaz, Guatemala.

Relata: Recuerdo que un 25 de septiembre del año 1983 bajamos a la plaza con mi madre a vender productos y comprar alimentos, cuando se nos acercaron unos hombres y le dijeron a mi madre "queremos platicar con tu hija". Mi madre se asustó y empezamos a caminar rápido. Yo avancé y me alcanzó el señor XXX. No fueron tres, sino varios hombres quienes me obligaron a acompañarlos rumbo al calvario, y trate de escapar, pero me subieron en una pick-up, llevándome hasta el destacamento. Allí me encerraron en un cuarto juntamente con mi prima, preguntaron por el paradero de mi esposo y el de otra persona. Como no les respondí, se me acercó un soldado agarrándome de mi collar, obligándome a darles información sobre la guerrilla. Entrando la noche me violaron. Ellos vestían de militares. Durante 25 días fui prisionera en ese destacamento. Me llevaron a bañar y luego me llevaban con otros oficiales. Logré reconocer al señor XXX y a XXX. Ellos eran vecinos de nuestra comunidad. El señor XXX fue quien masacró a mi familia el 29 de julio de 1982. Allí perdí a mi hermana, hermano, sobrinos; mi padre murió de enfermedad común y mi madre aún vive. Cuando salí del destacamento me hicieron regresar a mi comunidad, fue así que viajé a la capital a trabajar en una tortillería. No me sentí cómoda, no era mi ambiente, por lo que regresé a mi comunidad un 27 de enero del año 1984. En ese año nuevamente nos capturaron y nos llevaron a la comunidad Samaus, nos amarraron y nos llevaron a Chichipac, en donde instalaron una colonia donde fuimos tratadas como esclavas, al servicio de los militares y soldados. Nos despojaron de todo.

30 años después decidimos organizarnos como mujeres sobrevivientes de violencia sexual ante el Ministerio Publico de Salamá y tribunales de justicia en la ciudad capital. No denunciamos en seguida por temor y desconfianza en el sistema de justicia porque nuestro pensamiento era "los policías son amigos de los militares". Sin embargo, transcurrió el tiempo y conocimos a las abogadas del Bufete Jurídico Popular y ellas fueron quienes nos apoyaron con la atención psicosocial y para iniciar nuestro proceso de denuncia. Al momento de ir al juzgado, la jueza no dio valor a nuestro testimonio, en la primera audiencia nos pidieron pruebas. Nos sentimos discriminadas. En la audiencia intermedia del año 2020 dejaron libres a los seis exmilitares que nos violaron sistemáticamente. Nos sentimos frustradas.

Elvira es mujer indígena, originaria del municipio de la Tinta (Alta Verapaz), cuenta con 47 años de edad.

Relata: Como promotora de la organización Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) en el municipio de la Tinta, brindé acompañamiento a mujeres sobrevivientes de abuso sexual durante el conflicto interno; escuché testimonios frustrantes y dolorosos de las mujeres que fueron abusadas sexualmente, despojadas de sus pertenencias. Lo más cruel fue el arrebato de sus esposos para asesinarlos sin piedad, dejándolas viudas y a sus hijos e hijas huérfanos.

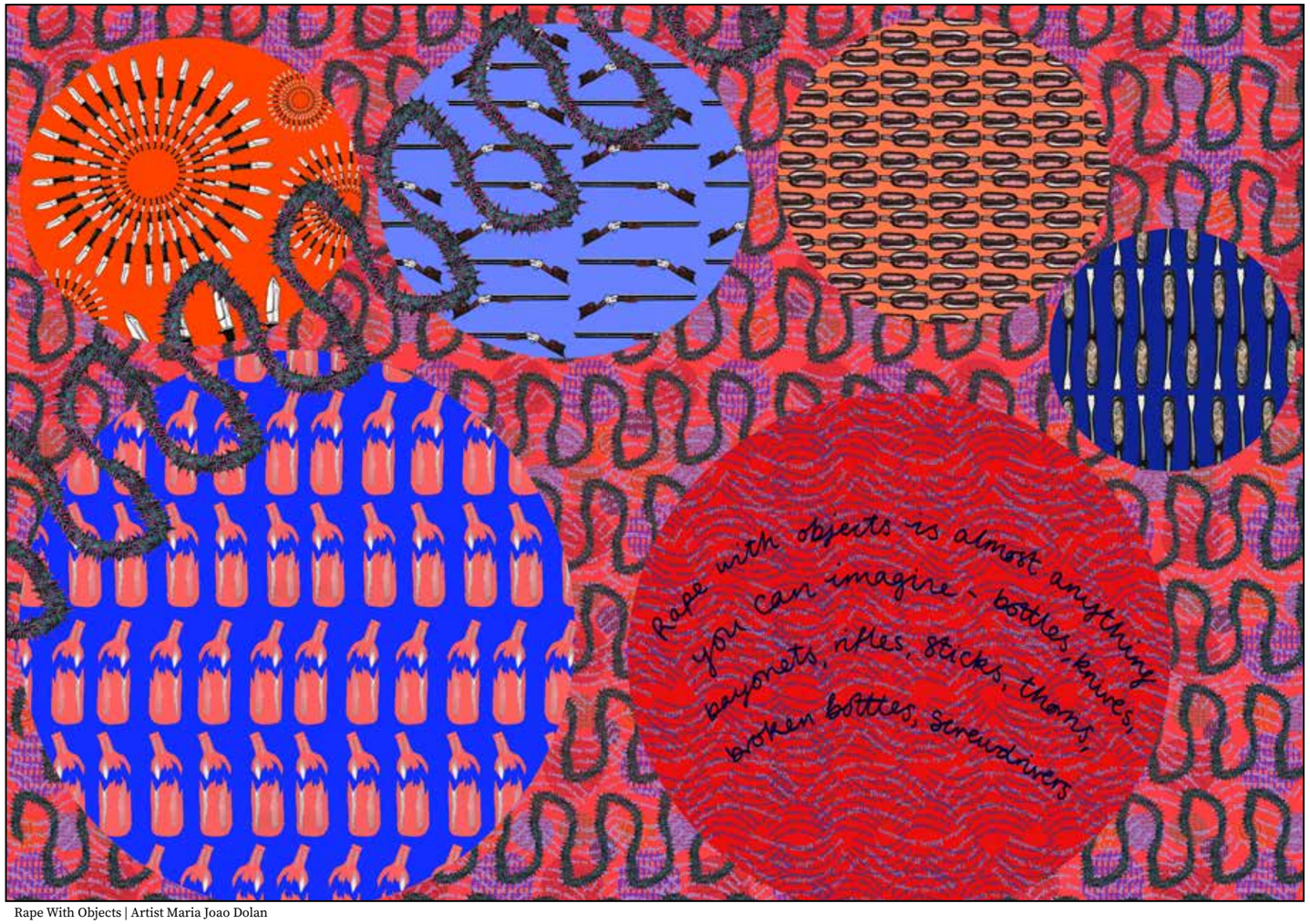
No recuerdo el año, pero sí la fuerza y el coraje que tenían las mujeres sobrevivientes del conflicto armado interno, por el acceso a la justicia. Se organizaron y fuimos al Ministerio Público, en dónde les tomaron las denuncias. Sin embargo, sus anhelos por acceder a la justicia se volvieron frustrantes: cada vez que volvían a preguntar por sus casos, les volvían a pedir relatar los hechos sin que ese esfuerzo significase obtener respuesta, por lo que decidimos no volver al sistema de justicia como medida de seguridad y protección a la integridad.

Admiro a las abuelas de Sepur Zarco por cómo fueron perseverantes y cómo alzaron sus voces para acceder a la justicia. Reconozco que no fue fácil pero el acompañamiento de las organizaciones internaciones influyó para que sus voces fueran escuchadas ante los tribunales de justicia. Hoy son un ejemplo de valentía y dignificación de sus derechos. Han fallecido ya varias mujeres sobrevivientes de violencia sexual durante el conflicto armado interno sin haber obtenido justicia. Las que aún quedan con el tiempo decidieron silenciar su voz, para que sus generaciones no se avergonzaran de ellas y proteger a sus familias de represalias por parte de sus victimarios. Para mí es frustrante reconocer cómo el sistema de justicia es corrupto y discriminador. Ahora mi labor como lideresa es acompañar y animar a aquellas mujeres y jóvenes para la búsqueda de justicia hasta que sus voces sean escuchadas y caminemos juntas por el camino de la construcción de la paz.

GUINEA CONAKRY

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ASSOCIATION DES VICTIMES, PARENTS ET AMIS DU 28 SEPTEMBRE 2009 (AVIPA)

UNICEF Photo | Olivier Asseli



Rape With Objects | Artist Maria Joao Dolan

Moi, Asmaou Diallo, née en 1959 à Mali Yimbering République de Guinée mère de cinq fils, je suis divorcée. Aujourd'hui je fais mon témoignage sur les massacres du 28 septembre 2009 en Guinée. Avec le gouvernement Dadis Camara chef de la junte militaire au pouvoir en ce moment, les forces vives ont organisé un meeting au stade de Conakry pour empêcher la présentation des militaires au pouvoir. Et c'est là que ma vie à complètement changé, ce lundi sanglant comme l'indique Human Rights Watch dans son rapport. Ce jour à 11h du matin mon fils Mohamed Aly Conté a été tué. Après une semaine de recherche dans les hôpitaux, dans les prisons en présentant sa carte d'identité nationale, c'était impossible de le retrouver dans les morgues. Après une semaine on nous a demandé de venir à la grande mosquée de Conakry et c'est là que j'ai reconnu mon fils. On a récupéré le corps pour l'inhumer un vendredi à 17h et c'était le 2 octobre 2009.

Alors depuis ce jour, comme je le disais au début, ma vie a complètement changé. On s'est retrouvé en groupe pour parler de l'impunité et c'est là que AVIPA est née. Notre objectif c'était d'abord de retrouver tous les blessés, recenser les morts et avoir une idée du nombre de personne disparues. Depuis ce jour je n'ai pas pu faire mon deuil ni avoir un temps de repos. Je me suis dit qu'il faut arriver à une conclusion, qui est la justice, la vérité, la réparation et la garantie de non-répétition. Donc dans tous ces points je me suis assignée aussi comme objectif d'aider les femmes victimes de viol en particulier sans oublier les hommes qui attendent toujours une assistance pour pouvoir vivre une vie meilleure. Avec l'aide des partenaires on a réussi à prendre en charge les victimes dans leur soutien médicale et psychologique et sans oublier le gros du problème qui est la justice. Aujourd'hui on a 547 victimes reconnues par AVIPA et 500 victimes qui sont déjà passées devant les juges d'instruction pour leur audition. En décembre 2017 l'instruction a été clôturée pour aller au procès si toutefois il y'a une volonté politique réelle. Depuis 2009 à nos jours j'ai une bonne collaboration avec les survivantes.

Les victimes du 28 septembre sont très engagées et courageuses. Malgré les pertes que nous enregistrons on continue la lutte ensemble pour pouvoir obtenir justice et autres avantages. Nous voulons que le gouvernement prête attention à nos recommandations et doléances pour nous accorder la vérité, justice, réparation et la garantie de non-répétition pour que ça nous mène à la réconciliation nationale.

Je m'appelle XXX, j'ai 28 ans, je travaille chez AVIPA. J'ai commencé à travailler avec les survivantes il y a trois ans et je trouve qu'elles sont de braves dames car elles ont enduré trop de souffrance depuis l'évènement du 28 septembre 2009. Beaucoup d'entre elles ont perdu leurs foyers, d'autres sont tombées physiquement et mentalement malades, mais avec les différents soutiens elles font preuve de beaucoup de courage car elles arrivent à surmonter leurs peines et chagrins et retrouvent peu à peu leurs vies d'avant. Avec les soutiens psychologiques qu'elles reçoivent elles retrouvent le sourire et n'ont plus peur d'exprimer leurs sentiments et leurs désirs. Maintenant, grâce aux activités génératrices de revenus et au programme de réparation intérimaire individuelle et collective, elles arrivent à subvenir aux petits besoins familiaux et surtout elles assurent les frais de scolarité de leurs enfants. Selon leurs différents témoignages et surtout la bonne humeur qui se lit sur leurs visages leurs vies ont beaucoup changé et selon elles c'est grâce à Dieu et au soutien inlassable des bonnes volontés notamment AVIPA et tous ses partenaires. Toute l'équipe de façon générale est ravie de voir le sourire sur leurs visages car dit-on la joie et la paix du cœur se lisent sur leurs visages.

Je m'appelle XXX, j'ai 45 ans, je suis d'origine guinéenne et l'incident s'est produit le 28 septembre 2009 à 11h. J'avais été au stade le matin. A l'intérieur il y'avait une foule qui s'amusait. 30 minutes plus tard les militaires sont rentrés en fermant toutes les portes et se sont mis à tirer sur les gens. Au moment où je courais pour m'enfuir quatre militaires se sont jetés sur moi, m'ont amené dans un coin pour me violer à tour de rôle en me battant et en m'insultant. J'étais terrifiée à l'idée qu'ils me tuent. Mais par après ils m'ont abandonné couchée au sol et c'est un homme qui m'a aperçue pour me faire sortir de là. Les auteurs appartenaient aux forces armées de l'Etat. Au début je n'avais personne pour m'aider. Pour mes soins médicaux il a fallu que je me débrouille pour me soigner et j'ai pu obtenir un certificat médical.

Après l'incident, j'avais signalé mon cas auprès d'une institution et en 2011 j'ai été à AVIPA. Au début c'était difficile de rapporter mes faits mais ils ont été attentionnés envers moi. C'est par la suite que j'ai eu accès à un soutien psychologique, aux soins médicaux et à une réparation. Tous les membres de ma famille m'ont rejetée pour ça et je n'ai pas pu signaler l'incident à temps parce qu'ils recherchaient tous ceux qui étaient au stade ce jour-là. Je n'ai pas vécu ma quête de justice pour le moment mais je souhaite vraiment l'obtenir devant un tribunal pour qu'on punisse toutes ces personnes responsables de mon acte de violence sexuelle.

A part les réparations que j'avais obtenues avec AVIPA et ses partenaires, je n'ai reçu aucun dédommagement venant de l'Etat. Aujourd'hui ma situation s'est beaucoup améliorée avec les traitements médicaux et psychosociaux qu'AVIPA et ses partenaires m'ont fourni. Je souhaite vraiment qu'on me rende justice pour tout ce qu'ils m'ont fait subir.

Photo| GETTY

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ASSOCIATION DES VICTIMES, PARENTS ET AMIS DU 28 SEPTEMBRE 2009 (AVIPA)

Je m'appelle XXX, j'ai 45 ans, je suis d'origine guinéenne. L'incident s'est produit le 28 septembre 2009 à 10h dans l'enceinte du stade à côté des cabines des policiers. Lorsque je suis arrivée, les portes du stade étaient fermées. Quelques minutes après les leaders sont arrivés. Plus tard je suis rentrée à l'intérieur du stade, je m'amusais. D'un coup j'entends des coups de feu. C'est en ce moment que j'ai vu des gens tomber de la tribune étant morts. En voulant m'enfuir je suis tombée avec deux militaires qui m'ont frappée, humiliée et violée à tour de rôle et lorsqu'ils ont terminé je me suis difficilement levée pour pouvoir m'échapper. C'est là que la Croix Rouge m'a interpellée pour me transporter à l'hôpital. Les auteurs qui m'ont fait subir ces actes de violence appartenaient aux forces armées de l'Etat.

Au début je n'avais pas signalé l'incident parce que les forces armées nous recherchaient. Après mes traitements, on m'a mise en rapport avec une institution internationale (Human Rights Watch) à côté de l'ambassade des Etats-Unis. Pendant six ans j'ai eu à prendre en charge mes frais de traitements personnellement. A l'hôpital Femmes Mères et Enfants ils nous ont pris en charge pour obtenir un certificat médical. Quelques années plus tard j'ai été à AVIPA pour rapporter les faits que j'ai subis. Bien que j'étais terrifiée ils m'ont traité avec respect et dignité. Les membres de ma famille ne m'ont jamais soutenue surtout mon mari qui m'avais rejetée.

C'est en 2017 que j'ai eu accès aux services grâce à AVIPA et ses partenaires sinon avant ça je me prenais personnellement en charge pour tous mes traitements. Je souhaite vraiment obtenir justice et vérité en nous expliquant pourquoi ils nous ont fait subir ces formes de violences sexuelles et qu'il y ait réparation et réconciliation. Je pense que les manifestants n'auraient pas dû être été réprimés pour avoir réclamé leurs droits parce que la manifestation est reconnue par la constitution guinéenne. Ma situation s'est améliorée au fil du temps grâce aux thérapies et cela m'a permis de vivre avec la société. Tout ce qui m'importe aujourd'hui et tout ce dont j'ai besoin c'est la justice et que ces violences cessent dans le monde.

Les photos ne sont pas associées à des témoignages.

Je m'appelle XXX, j'ai 48 ans et je suis d'origine guinéenne. L'incident s'est produit le 28 septembre 2009 à 11h. J'avais été au stade avec mes amies une fois à l'intérieur j'ai commencé à m'amuser. Après l'arrivée du leader politique Jean-Marie Doré, j'ai entendu soudainement des coups de feu. Je voyais des gens qu'on tuait à bout portant et d'autres se faisant poignarder. Lorsque j'ai voulu m'enfuir, quatre militaires m'ont attrapée, m'ont fait tomber à terre en me frappant avec leurs armes puis ils ont déchiré mes vêtements et ils ont abusé de moi à tour de rôle. C'est lorsque la 3ème personne est montée sur moi que j'ai perdu connaissance. Quelques temps après m'être retrouvée, je me suis rendue compte qu'ils m'avaient déjà embarquée avec des cadavres dans une ambulance. Ces auteurs qui m'ont fait subir ces actes de violences appartenaient aux forces armées de l'Etat.

Au début je n'avais pas signalé l'incident parce qu'ils nous recherchaient. Il a fallu que je parte au village pendant trois mois. J'ai attendu six mois pour signaler mon cas à AVIPA. Bien que c'était difficile pour moi de rapporter les faits que j'avais subis, j'avais été traitée avec dignité. Aucun membre de ma famille ne m'a soutenue, y compris mon mari, jusqu'à nos jours m'ont tous rejetée.

Avec l'aide de l'ONG AVIPA et de ses partenaires j'ai eu accès aux soins médicaux, à un soutien psychologique et à une réparation. Mais venant de l'Etat je n'ai reçu aucun dédommagement. Je n'ai jamais dépensé pour signaler mon cas aux autorités ni vécu. Ma quête de justice mais je souhaite l'obtenir devant un tribunal pour qu'ils aient à juger toutes ces personnes responsables de mon acte de violence sexuelle.

Aujourd'hui je me sens bien par rapport au passé et tout ce qui importe c'est de prendre soin de mes enfants pour qu'ils n'aient pas à subir tout ce que j'ai vécu. Ce dont j'ai besoin, en tant que rescapée, c'est d'obtenir justice et qu'ils nous aident à stopper ces actes de violences sexuelles.

Je m'appelle XXX, j'ai 48 ans, je suis d'origine guinéenne. L'incident s'est produit le 28 septembre 2009 à 10h dans l'enceinte du stade. Très tôt le matin j'ai apprêté mon bébé puis j'ai marché jusqu'à la belle vue avec un groupe d'amies mais la route était déjà barrée. On a continué à marcher et d'un coup je me suis rendu compte que je les avais perdus de vue. Une fois à l'intérieur du stade quelques minutes après ils ont commencé à tirer sur la foule et lorsque j'ai essayé de m'échapper vers la sortie c'est là j'ai été aperçue par quatre militaires qui m'ont battue avec leurs armes. J'étais sans défense quand ils me violaient à tour de rôle.

Quelques minutes après, la Croix Rouge m'a transportée à l'hôpital le plus proche. Ceux qui m'ont fait subir ces actes de violences appartenaient aux forces armées de l'Etat. Je n'avais pas signalé l'incident à temps parce qu'ils recherchaient toutes les victimes. Plusieurs mois après j'ai été à AVIPA. Bien que j'étais terrifiée à l'idée de rapporter mes faits, ils m'ont traitée avec respect et dignité. C'est là que j'ai eu accès à un soutien psychosocial et aux soins de traitements.

Malgré cela toute ma famille m'a rejeté jusqu'à nos jours. J'avais eu à témoigner devant des juges d'instruction mais jusqu'à présent je n'ai pas obtenu justice. Seul AVIPA et ses partenaires m'ont aidé avec les réparations et à obtenir un certificat médical. L'Etat aurait dû appliquer la loi sur la transition et punir les précédents actes de violences notamment le 27 janvier 2007. Avec les assistances d'AVIPA et de ses partenaires, je me sens mieux. Le plus important c'est d'obtenir justice pour moi et pour toutes les victimes. Ce dJe m'appelle XXX, j'ai 61 ans, je suis d'origine guinéenne. L'incident s'est produit le 28 septembre 2009 à 10h. J'avais été au stade, une fois à l'intérieure je me suis assise dans les tribunes pour acclamer la foule. D'un coup j'ai entendu des coups de feu à plusieurs reprises et toute la foule s'est dispersée. Les militaires recherchaient les leaders pour les tuer. Lorsque j'ai voulu m'enfuir, ils m'ont attrapé en me battant avec leurs armes. Ils m'ont déshabillée puis ils m'ont violée en me menaçant de me tuer et en m'insultant. C'est en ce moment que la Croix Rouge m'a récupérée et m'a cachée jusqu'à ce qu'on me sorte de là. Ces auteurs appartenaient aux forces armées de l'Etat.

Au début, j'avais peur de sortir pour signaler l'incident parce qu'ils nous recherchaient. Je me suis personnellement prise en charge pour mes frais d'hôpitaux juste après l'incident. C'est en 2010 que j'avais été à AVIPA pour signaler mon cas. Mon moral était bas au moment où j'ai rapporté les faits mais ils m'ont bien traitée. J'ai pu accéder aux soins médicaux, y compris un certificat médical, à un soutien psychologique, aux frais de justice et à une réparation, même si certains membres de ma famille m'ont rejetée y compris mon mari.

J'avais été voir les juges d'instruction en 2011 mais je n'ai toujours pas obtenu justice et je souhaite vraiment qu'il condamne ces personnes responsables de mon acte de violence sexuelle. J'aimerais que les autorités prennent des mesures nécessaires pour éviter la répétition des violences sexuelles. Avec l'aide d'AVIPA et de ses partenaires, je me sens heureuse et en bonne santé avec mes traitements médicaux et ma thérapie. Tout ce qui est important pour moi aujourd'hui c'est d'améliorer ma situation. Grâce aux réparations individuelles tout se passe bien. Tout ce dont j'ai besoin en tant que rescapée c'est d'obtenir justice et aider les autres victimes à sensibiliser les autorités pour stopper ces violences sexuelles.

Je m'appelle XXX, j'ai 56 ans, je suis d'origine guinéenne. L'incident s'est produit le 28 septembre 2009 à 10h. Je suis allée au stade le matin. Une fois à l'intérieur, je me suis assise à la loge officielle. Plus tard, les militaires nous ont enfermés et ont commencé à tirer et chacun de nous cherchaient à se sauver. Puis deux policiers m'ont attrapée et ils ont abusé de moi en me battant avec les armes. Lorsqu'ils m'ont relâché, un autre m'a interpellé pour me violer aussi. Il a fallu que j'escalade un mur pour pouvoir m'enfuir avec des habits déchirés et des blessures sur tout le corps. Ceux qui m'ont fait subir ces actes de violences appartenaient aux forces armées de l'Etat.

Au début je n'avais pas signalé l'incident parce qu'ils étaient à nos trousses. Trois ans après, j'ai pu aller à AVIPA pour rapporter mes faits. Ils ont été respectables et attentionnés envers moi. J'avais pu accéder aux soins médicaux, à un soutien psychosocial et à une réparation. Malheureusement dans tout ça, j'ai été rejetée par ma famille. Je n'ai pas vécu ma quête de justice pour le moment mais je souhaite vraiment l'obtenir devant un tribunal. Par peur je n'avais pas signalé mon cas aux autorités.

Je souhaite que l'Etat prend des dispositions pour éviter les violences sexuelles et aider les victimes à bénéficier d'une réparation. De nos jours tout se passe bien avec mes traitements et mon soutien psychologique. Je ne ressens aucune peur et je souhaite obtenir justice, qu'on punisse toutes ces personnes responsables de ces actes de violence sexuelle.

PHOTO | OYE

Je m'appelle XXX, j'ai 40 ans, je suis d'origine guinéenne. L'incident s'est produit le 28 septembre 2009 à 10h. J'avais été au stade. Une fois à l'intérieur il y'avait une foule qui s'amusait. Quelques temps après, j'aperçois des militaires qui commencent à tirer. Deux d'entre eux se sont jeté sur moi lorsque je fuyais et ont abusé de moi en me battant, en m'insultant. J'ai même été poignardé à la main. C'est grâce à un militaire qui m'a aidé à escalader le mur que j'ai pu m'en sortir de là. Les auteurs responsables de mon acte de violence appartenaient aux forces armées de l'Etat.

Je n'ai pas osé signaler l'incident à temps vu qu'ils nous recherchaient. J'ai attendu des mois après pour me rendre à AVIPA. C'est de là-bas j'ai rapporté mes faits avec difficulté en repensant à tout ce qui m'est arrivée. Je me sentais traumatisée. J'ai eu accès aux soins médicaux, à un soutien psychologique et à une réparation. Les membres de ma famille m'ont toujours soutenue sur ça. J'avais été voir les juges d'instruction mais je n'ai toujours pas obtenu justice Tout ce que je souhaite c'est d'obtenir justice et qu'ils évitent ces actes de violences sexuelles. De nos jours je me sens heureuse grâce aux thérapies qu'AVIPA m'a fourni. Je souhaite qu'ils condamnent toutes ces personnes responsables de ces actes de violence.

LES TÉMOIGNAGES SUIVANTS ONT ÉTÉ RECUEILLIS PAR L'ASSOCIATION DES VICTIMES, PARENTS ET AMIS DU 28 SEPTEMBRE 2009 (AVIPA)

Al Jazeera Photo |Tommy Trenchard

Je m'appelle XXX, j'ai 45 ans, je suis d'origine guinéenne. L'incident s'est produit le 28 septembre 2009 à 8h. J'avais été au stade avec un groupe d'amis. Une fois à l'intérieur nous sommes montés à la tribune et d'un coup j'ai entendu des coups de feu. Etant traumatisée j'ai voulu escalader le mur pour m'enfuir mais un militaire m'a fait tomber et je me suis évanouie. Quelques temps après je me suis retrouvée dans une chambre sombre étant ligotée et toute nue. C'est là que je me suis rendu compte qu'il m'avait violée. J'ai passée deux jours dans cet endroit. Puis un beau matin il m'a bandé les yeux pour me jeter loin de là. Il appartenait aux forces armées de l'Etat.

Je n'avais pas signalé l'incident au début mais quelques mois après en 2010 j'ai été à AVIPA pour rapporter mes faits. C'était vraiment difficile pour moi à force de penser à tout ce qui m'est arrivé. Aucun membre de ma famille ne m'a soutenue. Au début j'avais eu à bénéficier de l'aide d'un proche pour mes soins médicaux mais c'est à AVIPA que j'ai continué mes traitements. J'ai pu accéder à un soutien psychologique et à une réparation. J'avais été voir les juges d'instruction mais je n'ai toujours pas obtenu justice. Etant une victime je souhaite obtenir justice et condamner toutes ces personnes responsables de ces actes de violence sexuelles. Ma situation s'est améliorée grâce à l'aide d'AVIPA et de ses partenaires. Beaucoup de choses ont changé et tout ce qui importe pour moi actuellement c'est qu'on rende justice à toutes les victimes.

Les photos ne sont pas associées à des témoignages.

Je m'appelle XXX, j'ai 51 ans, je suis d'origine guinéenne. L'incident s'est produit le 28 septembre 2009 à 10h dans l'enceinte du stade. Ce matin-là en partant je me suis rencontré avec un group des forces armées qui m'ont lancé des gaz lacrymogènes. Mais j'ai réussi à m'introduire à l'intérieur. Quelques temps après l'arrivée d'un leader, ils ont commencé à tuer les gens. En cherchant à m'enfuir je me suis rencontré avec un militaire et je l'ai directement reconnu. C'était un voisin mais malgré ça il n'a pas hésité à me violer et me battre. Il a ensuite appelé deux de ses amis pour me tenir. Puis il a déchiré mon dos avec une lame. J'étais nue lorsque j'ai réussi à m'enfuir avec l'aide d'un civil. Ils appartenaient aux forces armées de l'Etat.

J'avais signalé l'incident auprès des autorités judiciaires mais ils n'avaient pas réagi C'est en 2010 que j'ai été à AVIPA pour rapporter mes faits. Cela a été très troublant pour moi en ce moment et ma famille m'a rejetée pour ça. Avec l'aide d'AVIPA et de ses partenaires j'ai eu accès aux soins médicaux et à un soutien psychologique. Je n'ai pas reçu un dédommagement venant de l'Etat. C'est seulement à AVIPA que j'ai bénéficier d'une réparation. Je souhaite qu'ils prennent des mesures pour aider les autres victimes à obtenir justice. J'étais traumatisée auparavant mais de nos jours je me sens bien grâce aux thérapies et aux soins médicaux.

Al Jazeera Photo |Tommy Trenchard

HAITI

Photo | HRS of BINUH-OHCHR

Photo | HRS of BINUH-OHCHR

HAITI

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY THE
HUMAN RIGHTS SERVICE OF BINUH-OHCHR

Rose (pseudonym) is a young woman in her early twenties who lives in a Port-au-Prince neighborhood under the control of a gang. One afternoon in June 2022, Rose and her little brother were alone at the family home when they suddenly heard loud noise coming from the nearby streets, with people shouting and objects being vandalized. They immediately knew that their neighborhood was being attacked by a gang opposed to the one that controlled the area. Before they had the time to flee, a group of men, masked and heavily armed, burst into Rose's home. They severely beat her with their weapons, leaving her almost unconscious, and then they raped her several times in front of her little brother. After the assailants were done with her, they grabbed her brother, tied him to a bed and brutally raped him one after the other. Rose witnessed the scene helplessly. After they finished, the men took the boy with them. Days later, his body was found with a gunshot to the head, laying in an abandoned site littered with huge piles of waste. Rose was reluctant to report the case to the authorities for fear of reprisals, but also because she knew that survivors of sexual violence are stigmatized by their own communities. However, as the attack had left Rose with severe injuries and acute psychological trauma, she sought the help of a local women's organization who assisted her, including accompanying Rose through her healing process. Rose says that the support that she received from this organization has been key to allow her to resume her life, even though she still suffers from psychological distress that affects many aspects of her daily activities.

The photos are not associated with the testimonies

On 7 July 2022, 19-year-old XXX was at home in Cité Soleil with her family when her house was sprayed with bullets and then burned and destroyed during clashes between gangs. Cité Soleil is one of the poorest and most marginalized areas in Port-au-Prince,, but it's also highly coveted by gangs, who clash frequently for control of territory. That night, her family fled the zone, but in the darkness, XXX lost her father, sibling and stepmother. Alone in the road, she was intercepted by masked armed men, who put a weapon to her neck and dragged her to a nearby field. The men raped and beat her, while asking her to confess to knowing people she actually did not know. When they were done, they told her to leave. XXX struggled to walk due to her injuries and was eventually helped by two strangers. These men carried her to a nearby square where hundreds of other persons fleeing from the violence had taken temporary shelter. There, she was reunited with her father. Not having the means to take her to a healthcare center, he brought an acquaintance with some medical knowledge to provide her with care. They stayed in the square for several weeks. During this time, XXX felt increasingly sick. Eventually, she went to a medical center and discovered that she was pregnant. She spent the rest of her pregnancy in the square, living out in the open, before returning to Cité Soleil, where she stayed at a friend's house of for the birth of her son in March 2023. She feels stigmatized by the community and unwelcomed at the home of her father and stepmother in Delmas, the area where the family resettled. To survive and provide for her son, she helps prepare food and washes dishes, and receives support from a religious congregation. XXX wants to leave Cité Soleil but does not have the money to do so.

Photo | HRS of BINUH-OHCHR

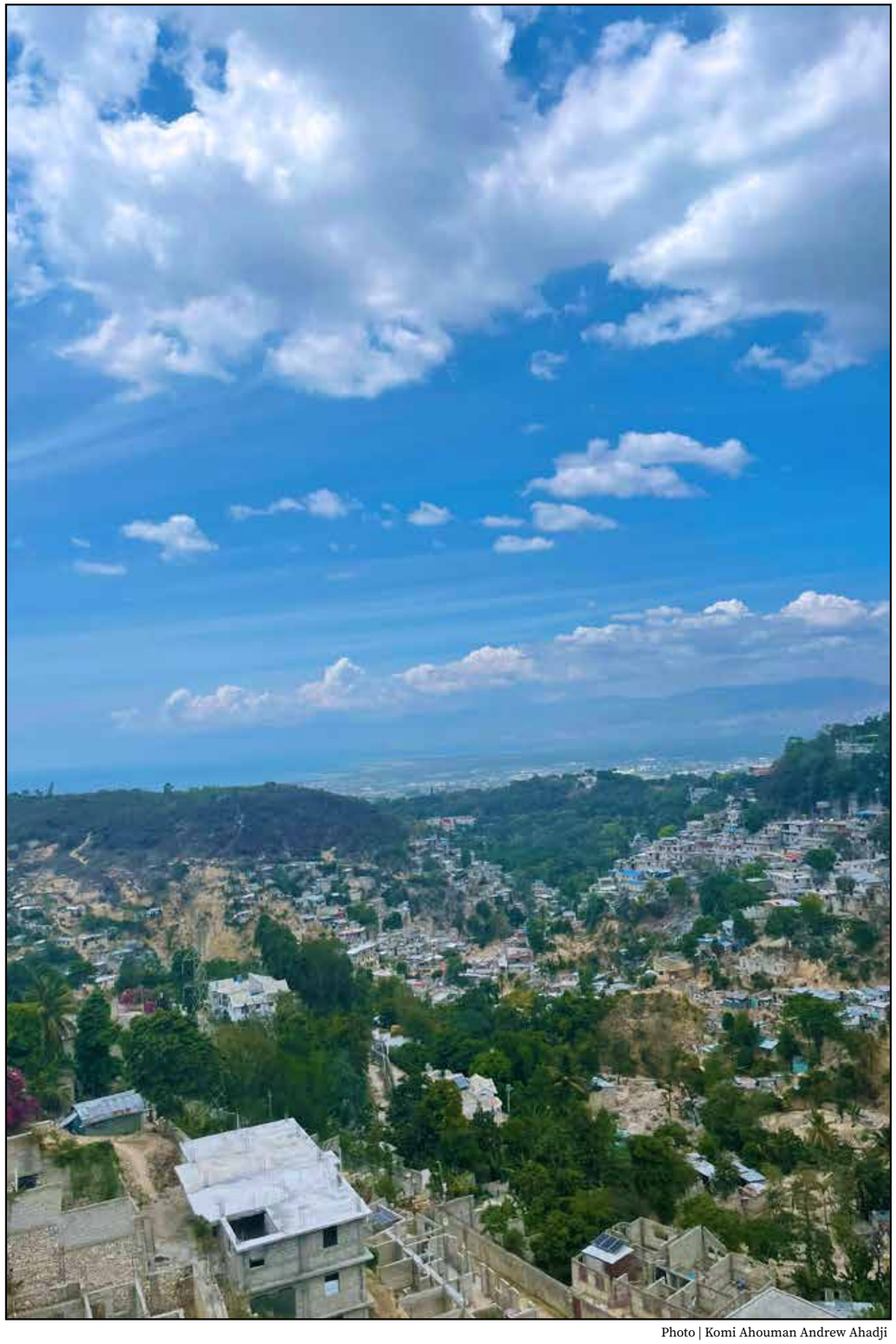


Photo | Komi Ahouman Andrew Ahadji

Late one night, 12-year-old XXX, her mother and cousin woke up to the sound of someone banging on the door, claiming to be the police. XXX 's mother refused to open, but after the man threatened to break in, she let him in. The man grabbed XXX and put a knife to her neck, and said to her mother and cousin, "If you make any noise, I will kill her." No one, not even her mother, dared to intervene. The man left the house with XXX, pushing her head down so she could not see his face. He took her to a nearby abandoned house, ripped off her clothes, and violently raped her. XXX remembers the darkness and silence of the night. When he was done, the man told XXX to leave. Covered in blood, she returned home where her mother washed and put her to bed. Her mother never told anyone what happened because of the stigma. Only the cousin knew and would sometimes speak about the incident with XXX.

XXX was 24 years old the second time she was raped. A friend living across the city had offered to give her money to help pay rent, and one afternoon she took a motorcycle taxi to go see him. Not far from her house, a group of armed and masked men stopped the motorcycle. They dragged XXX into a nearby field at gunpoint. One man raped her, while six stood watching. When they were done, they told her to leave, and she returned home. She did not tell her family what happened, but a few days later, she contacted someone working for an organization known to support women. She was taken to a clinic for medical tests, and XXX discovered she was pregnant with her second child.

XXX was raped a third time in July 2022 at age 30, during a period of intense clashes between gangs in the Cité Soleil commune. She was in a public transport vehicle, with around 13 other passengers, when the bus was stopped by masked and armed men in an area controlled by gangs fighting those where XXX resides. The men took the passengers to a nearby field. They made the eight men and boys kneel with their hands over their heads, then shot them dead. For the next six hours, they violently gang raped the six women and girls, including orally and anally, and carried out other acts of sexual humiliation and violence. When the men were finished, the women were released, and XXX returned home. The same day, she called the person that had helped her before, who transferred her to a hospital to receive medical care.

XXX still lives in Cité Soleil with her three children, aged eleven, six and five. She wants to move to a safer area but does not have the means to do so. To survive, she relies on support from members of the community, but she is often too ashamed to ask for help. Sometimes, she contemplates suicide. She knows that children join gangs when parents do not have enough food to give them. When she sees children fighting in the clashes between gangs, she thinks of her own.

My name is Davidson (pseudonym) and I live with my mother in a working-class neighborhood of Port-au-Prince. For Haiti's standards this means that we don't have a lot, but we have managed to live relatively well and in peace. This started to change a few years ago when gangs began to appear and to clash for the control of neighborhoods. Nowadays, my neighborhood is not safe anymore. I feel that you need to be careful about who you talk to and what you say because you risk retaliation by gang members. So, I always just mind my own business to avoid getting in trouble. I'm a gay person and I don't share this with a lot of people, just with my close friends because people talk, and homosexuality is not well accepted in Haiti, not even in my family. However, even if I've always been discrete to avoid problems, some months ago a group of men – I can't remember exactly how many – forced their way into our home and raped me and my mother several times. In my case, they also raped me using their guns. I was not able to recognize the assailants, as they were all masked. But they must have known me because, during the attack, they shouted at me humiliating words regarding my sexual orientation and threatened to kill me if I did not abandon the area. They told me that homosexuals were not welcomed in the neighborhood. I cannot tell for sure, but I think they were members of the local gang. After the attack, my priority was to take my mother to see a doctor. I took her to a local clinic, but I did not mention anything about my own attack for fear of being stigmatized or that the doctor would not believe my story. I did not want to report the case to the police either for the same reasons. After my mother received medical care, I drove her outside the capital where part of our family lives. She would be much safer there. However, we were afraid of my family's reaction if we told them that we had been raped, so we just told them that we had been beaten by some men when they entered our home to rob us. Afterwards, I returned to Port-au-Prince and sought help in a local LGTBI+ rights association where I received medical and psychological help. In this organization, I have found a safe and friendly environment where I can talk freely about what happened to me and to share my concerns with persons who have endured similar experiences.

Photo | Komi Ahouman Andrew Ahadji

IRAQ

IRAQ

UNICEF Photos | Alessio Romenzi

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY HÁWAR.HELP

My name is Najlaa Matto. I am a 35-year-old Yazidi woman from Kocho, a village in the Sinjar District of northern Iraq. I was sexually abused for the first time around 10 PM on 6 September 2014. The next morning, I was sold to a Kurdish-speaking man who may have been from Sinjar. Around 3 PM on 7 September, I was sexually abused two more times. The perpetrators of these acts were members of the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIS). In August of 2014, they committed a genocide against the Yazidis in Sinjar. Families were torn apart: boys and men above 14 years old were killed in mass executions. Women and girls were systematically raped and sold into sexual and domestic slavery. The lives of at least 5000 Yazidis were taken in the most horrific ways. Thankfully, I was able to report the incidents to multiple people once I was released from captivity. First, I told my story to the Dohuk police. Secondly, a civil servant responsible for the documentation of the genocide against the Yazidis took my statement and DNA-sample. Finally, I told two or three Christian women that worked for a humanitarian organisation. No fees were charged to me for reporting. I was able to visit a Yazidi doctor soon after my liberation. She helped and supported many other victims like myself. A Yazidi dentist furthermore repaired a broken tooth which I had suffered as a result of beatings.

Contrary to my expectations, I was received positively by my community once I had returned. Instead of stigmatising me, they respected me for the hardships I had survived. I do not feel there is any justice, unfortunately. Although the Iraqi government recently announced that survivors would be entitled to reparations, this is not sufficient. As long as the perpetrators of ISIS are not brought to court, there will be no justice for the victims and survivors of the crimes they have committed. The entire world should have intervened with soldiers and airplanes to free the Yazidis in Sinjar and prevent their mass imprisonment, murder and the numerous acts of sexual violence against them. The support of the Iraqi government, the United Nations and Germany came too late when I and many other women had already been imprisoned.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed my life significantly. I can no longer share my experiences with others. Nor can I show the documentary in which my story is told, called "JIYAN – The Forgotten Victims of ISIS" by Düzen Tekkal. Although I have kept seeing my psychotherapist, I feel very alone. I cannot go outside to exercise, meet my friends and family or visit HÁWAR.help.

UNICEF Photos | Alessio Romenzi

The photos are not associated with the testimonies

I am XXX, a 15-year-old Yazidi girl from the village of XXX, which is located in the Sinjar region in northern Iraq. When ISIS attacked Sinjar, my family was kidnapped. I was sexually abused on 3 August 2014. Within a week, my mother, brother, two sisters and I were taken across the border to Syria. There, we were subject to torture and violent abuse. The perpetrators of these crimes were a group of Muslim men. I later found out they were members of ISIS. When I could finally escape from their captivity, my close family and relatives welcomed me with open arms. The Yazidi community treated me with utmost dignity and respect. My family helped me report these crimes to the authorities, including the local government and international organisations.

To this day, there is no justice though. Although I presented a detailed report of my experiences to the Iraqi courts, I have not yet received any form of state support or reparations. The only material and financial support I have been able to access are provided by NGOs such as the Nazarene Fund. I did incur some costs for reporting my case to the courts. Health services were provided to me free of charge by NGOs.

The lack of dialogue and understanding between different religious communities in Iraq is the reason the genocide against the Yazidis occurred. Protection from the state, more law enforcement and sanctions could have prevented all the violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit everybody in some way. Due to the restrictions on movement, I have not been able to keep raising awareness about the genocide against the Yazidis. The most difficult consequence of the pandemic is that it has also halted the search for missing people in my family and delayed the search for justice for survivors like me.

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY HÁWAR.HELP

I am XXX, I am a 25-year-old Yazidi woman from Sinjar, Iraq. In 2015 I came to Germany through a special humanitarian programme for vulnerable Yazidi women and girls. Around 11 AM on the morning of 15 August 2014, I was kidnapped and separated from my family by members of the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIS). I was brought to a large house with many other Yazidi women around my age. I was kept in their captivity four and a half months. The first two days, I stayed in a large house in Mosul with over 50 other Yazidi women. Many ISIS fighters came by to look at us and decide if they wanted to buy us. A European ISIS fighter eventually bought me and took me to Syria. His wife and daughter were injured, which is why he wanted me to be his servant. After a while, it became clear, however, that he wanted to marry me. When I refused, he sold me to a second European ISIS fighter. This man had promised me I would merely work for him and his family. Yet once I arrived at his house, I found out that he had lied. He had no family and forced me to sleep in his room. When I refused and started crying, he got extremely angry. He grabbed a box and shoved it against my mouth, holding it tightly. That day he tried to kill me… Thankfully I was strong and could push him away. After this incident, he threatened to sell me to XXX an infamously ruthless Syrian ISIS fighter. He eventually sold me back to the family that had previously owned me. I now found myself with five or six other Yazidi women and was desperate to stay, thinking I could escape from this family more easily. Begging and pleading, I could convince them to keep me. One day, the wife of this family lent her phone to me and the other Yazidis. When we called our families, our brothers in Kurdistan could locate us thanks to the phone number. They paid a ransom to Arab men working with ISIS to buy us free. That way I finally escaped from captivity.

Once back in Kurdistan, I was in need of psychological and medical care. I was often ill, cried endlessly and could not sleep. Yet I had to bear all these medical costs myself. At this point, I also felt like I was treated differently than before. However, I knew that I was different! I knew too, that I would never again live as I did before. Many things can never be replaced, like my family. We have a saying that goes "you can get everything back, except people".

Upon my arrival in Germany in 2015, many German women helped me tremendously. I am so thankful to have had their support, especially that of my advisor. She taught me everything I needed to know to continue my life here. Moreover, I could finally access free health care. To achieve justice, the recognition of the genocide by the international community is of utmost importance to Yazidis. I have not brought my case to court yet, nor do I know anyone who has. As of yet, I have not received any reparations either. It is also unjust that many children and other family members of Yazidis that could flee are still stuck in Iraqi camps. The living conditions there are extremely poor and fires often break out.

UN Photo | Mark Garten

My name is Ekhlas Bajoo. I am a 20-year-old Yazidi woman from the Sinjar District of Iraq. When the so-called "Islamic State", also called ISIS, invaded Sinjar on 3 August 2014, they imprisoned me and my family. That day, they killed my father before my eyes. All men and women were separated from each other. Since I was only 14 years old at the time, I was separated from my mother and brought to a large house with around 500 women between the ages of 8 and 28. A part of those women and girls were trafficked to Syria. The others, including me, stayed in Iraq. A 34-year-old ISIS fighter from Mosul picked me out of all those women. I stayed in his captivity for about six months, although they felt like years. During this time, I was imprisoned in a large house with 48 ISIS fighters and one other enslaved Yazidi girl who became my friend. This man did so many terrible things with me. He used to tie my hands, feet, and mouth so that I could not defend myself against him. It was so horrible that I did not want to live anymore, I tried to commit suicide four times. After trying and failing three times, me and my friend could finally escape captivity after our fourth attempt. As we had managed to get a hold of a mobile phone, we could call warn my brother who was in the Peshmerga. In turn, he notified some Yazidi fighters who were stationed in the Sinjar mountains and eventually brought us to safety.

In the direct aftermath of my escape, I refused to talk to anyone about my experiences. Luckily my brother was there for me, he took me to Kurdistan and encouraged me to pick up my life again. I was able to go to school and do some therapy sessions. At this point only, I felt ready to share my experiences. I reported my case to the police but did not have the strength to go into detail. Although it pained me, I also told my story to many organisations and journalists. I could visit doctors regularly, yet I was in dire need of good and regular psychotherapy. Unfortunately, my options were limited in Iraq.

Once I had arrived in Germany, I did therapy for one and a half years. I also went back to school and learnt German. Moreover, I started working with the organisation 'Roads of Success'. They have empowered me to become a voice for other ISIS survivors and victims. I have travelled to London, New York, and Luxemburg with them to share my story and host workshops where I convey hope to other survivors. As soon as I had saved up enough money, I immediately returned to Iraq and Syria. I have undertaken several trips there now, during which I help young people cope with their trauma by teaching them methods that I learnt during therapy. My ultimate goal is to give hope to women who have similar experiences to mine. I want them to realise their strength and convince them to never give up.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken up my life quite a bit once more. I used to go to school every day and travel regularly. Now everything just takes place online. Fortunately, I was still able to start my training as a medical assistant this year. Today, there is still no justice for the women who were trafficked, enslaved, and abused by ISIS.

To conclude, I would like to encourage people with similar experiences to mine to share their stories, so that what happened to us will not happen to others. I also want to emphasise that although us, Yazidis, will continue fighting together until we have achieved justice, we cannot do so alone. Yazidis need to be able to return to their homes in Sinjar. They need protection and the necessary resources to restart their lives

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY DR. IBTISAM AZIZ ALI, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF IRAQI COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

My name is XXX, and I am a 19-year-old girl from Iraq. At the time of my capture, I was 15 years old, and I was living with my family of seven in XXX village. My life was simple: I went to school, and had a dream, like most girls, to finish school and to get a job to help my family. It never crossed my mind that one day I would end up being enslaved by Daesh. Daesh captured me and my family while we were attempting to escape to Kurdistan at the border of Sinoni. We were taken alongside many other Yazidi families, to a camp in Khansoor village. We lived in horror; we were beaten, abused and threated to either convert to Islam or to risk being murdered. During the night, we were taken to Syria, and I stayed there with my family. Twenty other families also endured abuse. Daesh militants also beat us up and deprived us of food and water for eight days. Daesh split up the young girls, married women, children, and men into groups took each group separately to Iraq. With a group of 20 Yazidi girls, I was also taken to Mosul in a bus that was used specifically to transfer captives. They took us girls to a triplex house, and we were kept on different floors. The members of Daesh conducted virginity tests since some of the girls claimed that they were married. If any girl dared to reject the test, then she would get beaten up horrendously and then taken by force. Each day, Daesh took a girl and told us that they were going to sell her. The girls were raped multiple times a day, violently; I remember hearing their screams. We were also deprived of food and water, and on the days that they did give us food, we only received a mere loaf of bread and a bottle of water. At night, we were forced to shower to wear revealing clothes. If any of us refused, then we would be beaten up until we fell to the floor covered in bruises and lying in a pool of our own blood. During the month that I was there, this was a reoccurring sight. I, alongside 14 other girls, were then taken to a place in Mosul that was called 'The court of Daesh'. I was kept in a dark, cell-like room with another girl. For a whole week, we weren't allowed to see the light of day. I was then gifted to a Daesh fighter named XXX. He was 45 years old, from Mosul and had two wives and 12 kids. I was forced to serve them. I did all the house chores, and was mercilessly abused—verbally, physically, and mentally. I stayed with them for three months until XXX forced me to marry him, began to take me to house, and repeatedly raped me for 6 months. He then sold me to another person who lived with a group of Daesh militant in what they called the 'Guesthouse'. There, they sold Yazidi girls for low prices or just gifted them to people. They treated the girls like objects. This is how I lived until the clashes between Daesh and the government began, and the location where we were was being shelled so much that the person who took me, ran away with me. He threatened me and told me that he would kill me if I did not tell the government that he had saved me. I agreed to do what he demanded because I had no other choice. Eventually, he had no choice but to turn himself in alongside the other militants because the government had taken control of the entire area. He and other militants claimed to be citizens of Mosul; and during the interrogation, I took my veil (Khimar) off, and told the governmental body that I am Yazidi and that the man had kidnapped me.

The government protected me, contacted my relatives, and took me to them. I stayed in a camp for a while. After my parents were freed, we were taken to live in Sinjar, where Yazda organization opened a little shop for us to help us make ends meet.

Photo Creatrivecommons | Zoriah

Limited Understanding | Artist Maria Joao Dolan

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY DR. IBTISAM AZIZ ALI, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF IRAQI COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

My name is XXX, I am 33 years old, and I am a survivor of conflict-related sexual violence. From 03-08 2014 until 03-02-2015, I was being held by Daesh. Before my capture, I lived in the village of Karzarik with my husband. My husband had been working in Baghdad during the Daesh terrorist attack. After the attack, my husband's family and I escaped. We headed toward the mountain, but before we could get to safety, we were captured by Daesh. We were detained with a group of Yazidi families in the Directorate of Civil Status of Sinjar in Sinjar. They told us to either convert to Islam, or to risk being killed. If we agreed to embrace Islam, then we were told that we would be treated kindly, and with respect, and that we would be offered food and drink. However, we refused to convert. As a result, the perpetrators beat us up and threatened to kill us. We remained there for the night. In the morning, the women and girls were taken by force to Badush (a prison in Mosul, Iraq). We stayed there for eight days. We were only fed one meal a day, which was only a loaf of bread. Sometimes we weren't even fed at all. We were taught Islamic teachings and were forced to wear a veil, pray and speak Arabic. If we objected, then we would be brutally beaten up. I and 15 other girls were transferred to Tal Afar, where we were each given to a family that was affiliated with Daesh. The person who took me, asked me to serve his family and his wives and children. I was forced to do all the housework. I lived in a small room in his—a storage room. I was forbidden from eating or sitting with them. If I was ordered to do something and I did not comply immediately, then I would get beaten up. I suffered with them for 6 months until I was sold to a Syrian Daesh militant. I was transferred to the Baghuz region of Syria, a region where many Yazidi families, girls, and children were held captive. There, I was raped multiple times a day, every day.

While I was there, there were clashes between the government and Daesh. The areas were shelled, and the government took me and others to Al-Hawl camp. Because I was dressed like them, and because I did not speak any Arabic, no one recognized me as a Yazidi; a person threatened me and told me that he would kill me if I were Yazidi. Days went by, and then I met one of my relatives at the camp. With them, I agreed to go to the camp's administration and surrender ourselves. We agreed where would meet and escape from. We then went to the camp's administration and told them that we were Yazidis and that we had been kidnapped.

We were taken to a house for Yazidis away from the camp. Upon return, my husband and I lived in a house in the city of Sinjar. We now have a baby girl. I work in a bakery in order to help my husband pay for everything.

My name is XXX and I was 17-years old when I was captured. I was living in the village of Rambosi. Two days prior to the events, I went to visit my uncle who lived in the village of Karzark to participate in the Eid ceremonies. While I was in Karzark, Daesh attacked the village. I fled with my uncle's family to the mountain, and before reaching the mountain, in an area called Qandil, we were captured and taken to Sinjar where we were locked in a school for about three hours and were threatened to either convert and pray or be killed. After that, the captors separated young girls, children, women and men and took me and the other girls to Mosul where we were held in a house. We were treated violently, and we forced to wear a veil and to pray. We were raped every day, beaten up, sold, and deprived of food. All in all, we were there for about a month, and then a person bought me and four other girls and took us to the village of Tal-bnat in the district of Sinjar. There, we were trapped in a house where we were raped continuously. Two days later, one of the girls who I was being held with, tried to escape but she was caught, brutally beaten, and then killed. They hung her and told us that if we tried to escape that we would share her fate. One of the girls could not bear what happened, so she threw herself off the roof and died. I remained with another girl, and a month later, we were transferred to the village of Ain Ghazal, where we were forced to have sexual intercourse and to learn Islamic teachings. Three months later, they took the girl that was being held with me, and I was left alone with a militant for two days. He then sold me to another person and transferred me to Tal Afar. I lived with the man who bought me, as a wife for a while in Tal Afar Hospital. While I was there, I met someone there who was among the Daesh militants, and he told me that he would rescue me. He told me that he had communicated with my father, and that he is arranging for us to escape so that I can be back to my family; I was able to talk to my father and my family. One night, about a month later, he ran away with me, called my father, and handed me over to him. After everything I went through, I did not get anything from the government, not even psychological help, let alone compensation or housing.

I am fully convinced that the government will not offer me anything. I am currently living with my family in the city of Sinjar. I suffer from a difficult psychological condition and cannot adapt to live a normal life. I still remember all the horrible situations that I went through. I feel that I have been exploited, even after fleeing from Daesh, because I married my cousin, a year after my liberation thinking that he would support me and help me, but then I discovered that he married me only because I am a survivor and that because of that, he might be able to leave the country. He used to treat me like a maid, and every day, he reminded me that I was a bad person and that I had been raped by Daesh. I could not bear it any longer, so I returned to my father's house, broken, lost, and without a glimpse of hope in life. If it were not for my family, I would not be able to endure such pain. My only wish is to have a job so that I can be distracted and self-sufficient.

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY ROADS OF SUCCESS NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION

This is Yvette and Jacqueline Isaac. For over five years, we have had the honor and privilege of standing beside the incredibly resilient, strong, and brave survivors of ISIS brutality - amplifying their voices and their calls for justice by the international community for the horrors they endured at the hands of ISIS. But over the past year with the advent of the COVID-19 crisis, these women and girls have faced isolation and their voices have been quieted. The stories of these beautiful, brave women need to be heard in more outlets across the world, for every time they have been heard, they have created tremendous change for human rights around the world.

The support of the international community means so much to them. When Ekhlas Khudur Bajoo spoke to the UK Parliament, telling them her story, the UK Genocide Resolution was passed--recognizing that what she and her family and her community had gone through at the hands of ISIS was genocide. This meant so much to her and to her fight for justice. When Ashwaq [see below] became the first female Yazidi survivor to testify before an Iraqi court against the ISIS fighter who had captured and raped her, this paved the way for the prosecution of ISIS fighters for their role in terrorizing women of minority faith communities.

When a Christian survivor of sexual violence in conflict anonymously (for her protection) gave a message to the UK government, she publicly called on the world to help. When she saw the response of government officials, hope was restored and she believed that she was no longer alone. These successes on the path to justice for survivors of religious persecution and sexual violence gives them and their communities hope. Thus, we need to continue to amplify their voices and share their stories and seek accountability through a survivor-centered approach to better understand their hopes for peace and justice.

My name is Ashwaq from Khansour village, north of Shankal. I am a Yazidi survivor of ISIS captivity. Everyone heard my story when I confronted—face-to-face—the ISIS terrorist Abu Hammam who raped me after he fell into the hands of the Security Forces. Many people stood against me–even governments—because I testified against him before an investigative judge. I know that execution is not an easy matter. For those who did not fall into the hands of ISIS like us [Yazidis] and did not see how they would trade us, perhaps he will say that "Ashwaq was not right—in terms of humanity and tolerance—for her demand for accountability of ISIS criminals, including Abu Hammam." On the contrary, however, my conscience was at ease when the death sentence[1] was issued against this criminal, and I pleaded with all parties to stand with us and help us arrest all ISIS fighters still alive, because their actions against us were not small when they separated us at a young age from our families and raped us. I wish they had executed us and they did not commit this heinous act against us!

Because of their crimes, we wish that you and all parties to help us—regardless of politics—because politics has nothing to do with our work. **The decision of the survivor should always be in her own hands; she is responsible, and others are not allowed to make any decision that concerns survivors without consulting with survivors.**

When ISIS fighter Abu Hammam was arrested by Security Forces in Iraq, they sent me a request, asking whether I wanted to confront Abu Hammam or not. **I requested to confront him face to face so he would know who I am and remember his heinous acts against me, how he separated me from my father, my mother, my sisters, my brothers, and how he beat me and tormented me**. He must taste while in prison a little of our suffering by being away from his family so he can learn well that we are courageous. We have not and we will not be afraid after this genocide that has befallen us. My hope is that the world and all governments will hear us. For how long will we remain so heartbroken and suffer in [refugee] camps or in Shankal? They must help us in order to achieve our goals and protect us because there are many who have evidence, but they are afraid to present the evidence they have due to a lack of protection.

I am not talking about the Yazidis only here—but all those who have been affected. However, you know very well that the Yazidis have been subjected to 74 genocide and they are continuing. So, we ask you to protect us and to not allow the enemies of humanity to kill us or the Yazidi identity.

[1] The United Nations Secretariat does not support the imposition of capital punishment as a penalty for any crime.

ARABIC TRANSLATION:

العربي

اسمي أشواق حجي حميد من مجمع خانصور شمال شنكال ناجية إيزيدية من قبضة عناصر داعش، الجميع سمعوا بقصتي عندما واجهت الداعشي الذي اغتصبني، أبو همام، بعد وقوعه بيد القوات الأمنية. الكثير من الناس وقفوا ضدي وحتى الحكومات لأنني شهدت ضده أمام قاضي التحقيق. أعرف أن الإعدام ليس أمراً سهلاً، ولكن من لم يقع مثلنا بيد داعش ولم ير كيف كانوا يتاجرون بنا، ربما سيقول إن أشواق لم تكن على حق من باب الإنسانية والتسامح لمطالبتها بمساءلة مجرمي داعش ومنهم الداعشي أبو همام.

على العكس تماماً أرى أن ضميري قد ارتاح عندما صدر حكم الإعدام بحق هذا المجرم وأناشد جميع الجهات الوقوف معنا ومساعدتنا للمساهمة في القبض على كل داعشي حي، لأن أفعالهم ضدنا لم تكن بسيطة عندما فصلونا ونحن صغار عن عوائلنا ليقوموا باغتصابنا. ويا ليتهم قاموا بإعدامنا ولم يرتكبوا هذا الفعل الشنيع ضدنا!

بسبب جرائمهم نتمنى منكم ومن جميع الجهات مساعدتنا، بغض النظر عن السياسة التي لا تمت لعملنا بصلة، ونحن بعيدون عنها ويجب أن يكون قرار الناجية دائماً بيدها وأن تكون هي المسؤولة وألا يُسمح للآخرين باتخاذ أي قرار يخص الناجيات دون التشاور معهن.

عندما تم إلقاء القبض على الداعشي أبو همام من قبل الجهات الأمنية في العراق أرسلوا لي طلبا يسألونني هل أنا راغبة بمواجهة أبو همام أم لا، فطلبت مواجهته وجها لوجه كي يعرف من أنا ويتذكر أفعاله الشنيعة ضدي وكيف فرقني عن أبي وأمي وأخواتي وإخواني وكيف كان يضربني ويعذبني. يجب عليه أن يتذوق وهو في السجن القليل من معاناتنا بالابتعاد عن عائلته وليعلم جيداً أننا شجعان لم ولن نخاف بعد هذه الإبادة التي لحقت بنا. ورجائي أن يسمعنا العالم وجميع الحكومات. إلى متى سنبقى هكذا مكسوري القلب ونعاني في المخيمات أو في شنكال. يجب عليهم مساعدتنا كي نحقق أهدافنا وأن يقوموا بحمايتنا لأن هناك الكثيرات ممن لديهن الأدلة لكنهن يخفن من تقديم ما بحوزتهن من دلائل لعدم وجود ظهر يحميهن. وهنا لا أتحدث عن الإيزيديات فقط، بل عن كل من تضرر. ولكنكم تعرفون جيدا أن الإيزيديين تعرضوا لأربع وسبعين إبادة، وهذا الوضع مستمر لذا نطلب منكم حمايتنا وعدم السماح لأعداء الإنسانية بقتلنا بسبب الهوية الإيزيدية.

Photo | Afshin Ismaeli

BOTH THE SURVIVOR AND THE INTERVIEWER WISH TO BE ANONYMOUS

I Wanted to Become a Lawyer

I am a Yazidi survivor in my early twenties. I come from the Sinjar region of Iraq. It all happened when I was a high school girl, a teenager. On 3 August 2014, ISIS captured me, my family and many other Yazidis at a checkpoint in Sinjar when we were trying to flee. There were many ISIS members there on that day, all wearing black. I was taken by them and remained in captivity for four years. During this period, I was sold several times between Iraq and Syria.

My family was very happy when I returned; they value me more than before I was captured. In the beginning, I didn't want to tell anyone about what happened. I was scared. But then I thought if I don't tell my story, no one would be able to reach my voice to someone else. I informed the local intelligence and some organizations of what I went through during the captivity. I started telling my story to ask for my right so as the one who did this to me will be held accountable. It is not good to talk about this, but no one will take your rights for you if you don't speak. I have tried to remain far from going to courts and testifying against the perpetrators because I think it is better not to do that. If I testify against ISIS, what would happen if they capture someone from my family. Besides, I still have family members that are missing.

Life hasn't been that much easier since I have returned. After my return, I had no identification documents. I had to get new ones, and that cost lots of money and time. My family, with the little they had, covered those expenses for me. Currently, I receive no support from anyone, not financial, medical, or any other kind. When I returned from captivity, I only had some medical tests done. Everything was ok, and that was it. I received counselling for about a month also. Then I stopped going to the sessions; I was feeling uncomfortable. I don't receive any psychological support because I feel better not receiving any; I don't feel happy about it. I don't know why.

In 2014, when I was in high school before the genocide, I had a dream of becoming a lawyer. Today, I cannot attend school again because I missed four years of school while in captivity. The education system wouldn't allow me to attend the regular school again because I have missed many school years. There is only the option of attending an external school, which is far, and I cannot afford the expenses of attending a far school, especially since I have no job. I want to finish school, but I even don't know where this external school is. If it is in Mosul, I cannot go there; I don't dare to go; the fear remains within me since my captivity time there. I wanted to be a lawyer, but now I feel I will not succeed anymore. I don't have the same urge as before, and I have lost hope. A future and a job come with a degree, but it didn't happen for me. I didn't finish school, neither did I reach my dream.

My family and I were supposed to travel abroad, but we could not do that because of the COVID-19 situation, and we lost that chance. Now I focus on travelling abroad. There is no future in Iraq. The only way we can be sure that what happened to us will not happen again is to have international protection. We cannot have the same situation again in Sinjar when ISIS attacked. Of course, ISIS will take women and girls and kill men when no one cared for us. But if there is someone to protect and defend us, this will not happen again. Therefore, it is better to go abroad because there is more protection there than in Iraq. There is no fear there. Survivors today need financial and mental support. Many Yazidi survivors cannot continue their education, have no job opportunities, just sitting and waiting, and you don't know when one day things will make sense again.

NYT Photo | Mauritio Lima

Photo | Office of the President of the Republic of Kosovo

KOSOVO

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY THE JAHJAGA FOUNDATION

Atifete Jahjaga, President of Kosovo (2011-2016), Founder and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Jahjaga Foundation

Rape has been used as a tool of war since wars exist. It serves aggressors as a strategic function for achieving specific political and military goals. Rape is conducted as an orchestrated military function of the aggressor, and is primarily carried out by the aggressor's military, paramilitary and police forces. Combatants who consciously engage in any action that violated international humanitarian law are a disgrace to humanity. Unfortunately, those who wrote the history of war rape across centuries have, in the majority of cases, escaped the powerful force of justice. Their impunity displays the many gaps in the national and international justice systems. Furthermore, it shows that rape continues to be the most neglected war crime. In Kosovo[2] , rape was used as a strategic tool of war during the 1998-1999 war. Within a timeframe of about fifteen months, Serbia's military and paramilitary forces raped around 20,000 women and men in a mounted campaign aimed at the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo. The target of this vicious rape campaign were young girls, women at different ages- many of them mothers, and also men. Rape was used as a brutal tactic designed to wipe off an entire population, or at least dishonor it- to rip it off everything that entails human dignity: worth, respect and pride.

More than two decades after the war in Kosovo, Serbian criminals responsible for killing, torturing, abducting, and raping thousands in Kosovo still run free. Their flight from justice is deafening as the sounds of terror still linger around in the memories of survivors.

Since I was sworn in as president of Kosovo in 2011, I have felt this terror, and I have seen the suffering and pain of hundreds of survivors of sexual violence during the war. I have witnessed their fear, anger, and desperation on many occasions in which- empowered by our readiness to hear them out- survivors have told me their stories full of dread and horror while showing me their scars and mutilated bodies. In most cases, survivors had never told these stories before fearing isolation, discrimination, stigma and abandonment from society and even their families- their husbands and wives, daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, and sisters and brothers. It felt undeniably terrible to see someone go to such lengths to deny their agonizing past by keeping their truth secret only to not be judged, blamed, or discarded by their most loved ones. Part of this ever-growing secret are children born out of rape, whose whereabouts are not always known to us. Some survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo admit never having told their child that it has been born as a result of a gruesome act. Others gave them free for adoption trying to hide any trace that would lead others to understand and believe the real truth. Actions like these surface the bitter reality survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo must cope with- an unjust, painful and unsafe one. I could sense their emotional insecurity and pain quite intensively in meetings I had with them individually, but it was one of my first meetings with a group of survivors of sexual violence that crushed my world so very fundamentally. As I was speaking in front of them offering my full support in their quest for justice and peace, one of the survivors stood up and opened her blouse to show us the deep scars on her body that were very visible even after more than fifteen years since the war had ended. She passed out a minute later.

I had never seen this kind of despair and hopelessness before and I had never been more moved by any story like I was that day.

But, stories like the ones of survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo are also stories of strength, courage and resilience, which motivated us to move ahead, fight for them and fight with them for recognition and justice. The following days and weeks after that

[2] All references to Kosovo in the present report shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Photo | Fadil Berisha

meeting changed everything. We were strong-willed and insistent to move the issue of survivors of sexual violence during the Kosovo forward and break, once and for all, the disturbing silence surrounding these survivors.

The Pristina Principles established during the International Women's Summit held in fall of 2012 under the patronage of my presidency served us as a guide in this endeavor. During the summit women across the world gathered in the Kosovo capital calling for actions from governments across the globe confirming that "conflict, post-conflict and transitional justice processes and institutions are gender sensitive" and highlighting the need for them to "acknowledge the legal status of rape victims, publicly recognize their magnitude of experiences, compensate them for their injuries and prosecute their perpetrators".

The establishment of the National Council for Survivors of Sexual Violence a year later was the first institutional response to a long conundrum that had been created over this issue. The Council- a joint group of lawmakers, government ministers, international representatives, representatives of the civil society, and the media, managed to bring change forward. Together, we pushed for the amendment of the existing law on martyrs, veterans and civil victims of the war by including survivors of sexual violence as a legal category into the legislation. Yet, we had to move beyond laws and regulations in order to let the survivors of sexual violence speak their piece of truth publicly. With the idea of Kosovo-British artist, Alketa Xhafa-Mripa, to hang skirts and dresses in a public area to symbolize our collective empathy and support for the victims, we called for solidarity with the survivors. After thousands of skirts and dresses hung on Pristina's football pitch under the theme "Thinking of You" in 2015, war rape was no longer kept under wraps! The art installation significantly contributed to the process of collective healing and encouraged more survivors to come forward with their stories. Through a holistic approach, we established small informal coordination groups that included representatives of state institutions, international diplomatic missions to Kosovo, the civil society, the academia and the survivors themselves. Following continuous and restless advocacy efforts towards the central government, we managed to push forward the formation of Government Commission for the Recognition and Verification of the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence during the Kosovo War. The application process for the status of survivor of sexual violence is ongoing and, so far, 1460 survivors have applied at the Commission through local non-governmental organization specialized in this area. Confidentiality and discretion are of utmost importance in this process since a large number of survivors does not feel ready yet to speak out about the horrible crime committed to them. It is especially important having in mind the survivors' emotional and mental state. Survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo live in constant fear for the past to be repeated in the future.

"After thousands of skirts and dresses hung on Pristina's football pitch under the theme "Thinking of You" in 2015, war rape was no longer kept under wraps! The art installation significantly contributed to the process of collective healing and encouraged more survivors to come forward with their stories."

They still struggle with social ostracism, emotional torment, psychological damage, physical injuries and- in many cases- disease. Through the process of verification of the status of survivors a great deal of progress will be achieved in offering them the opportunity to use their rights guaranteed by law, while it will help us help them in a more efficient and effective manner. The verification process of survivors of sexual violence during the war is crucial to dealing with the past in Kosovo. It will, however, not answer the fundamental demands of survivors: justice and peace!

Since the end of war in Kosovo, reports confirm that only three prosecutions on allegations of war crimes of sexual violence in Kosovo have been completed, which resulted in acquittals after appeals. More than two decades later there has not been a single conviction for war rape in Kosovo! The survivors of sexual violence during the war are a living testimony of the horrible crime Serbian forces committed to civilians during the 1998-1999 Kosovo war. Their stories speak volumes about a peoples' suffering and hardship, its survival and revival, but they also unfold a truth about strength, determination, and a terrific vigor to bring back normalcy, create stability, and restore peace. Since the first meeting with them, survivors of sexual violence during the war are at the heart of everything I do. After my mandate ended, I sought different ways to continue speaking up and fighting for them. One of them was establishing the Jahjaga Foundation. Among others, the Jahjaga Foundation works to address the stigma related to sexual violence during the war, empower survivors, and continue to raise the issue of sexual violence at the international level. In 2019, we organized the first international conference "Giving voice to survivors of sexual violence during the war" hosting 200 guests, including the virtual presence of Lord Ahmad, SRSG Pramila Patten, and Nadia Murad. We also hosted 200 survivors in a workshop to address the challenges and the stigma they face, and we will continue to be there for them in any way we can.

As a country, we will leave no stone unturned until justice is served to all Serbian criminals responsible for the immense human loss our people have suffered during the war in Kosovo. The wounds of survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo can only mend if justice is delivered. It is a precondition for healing, and an imperative for peace!

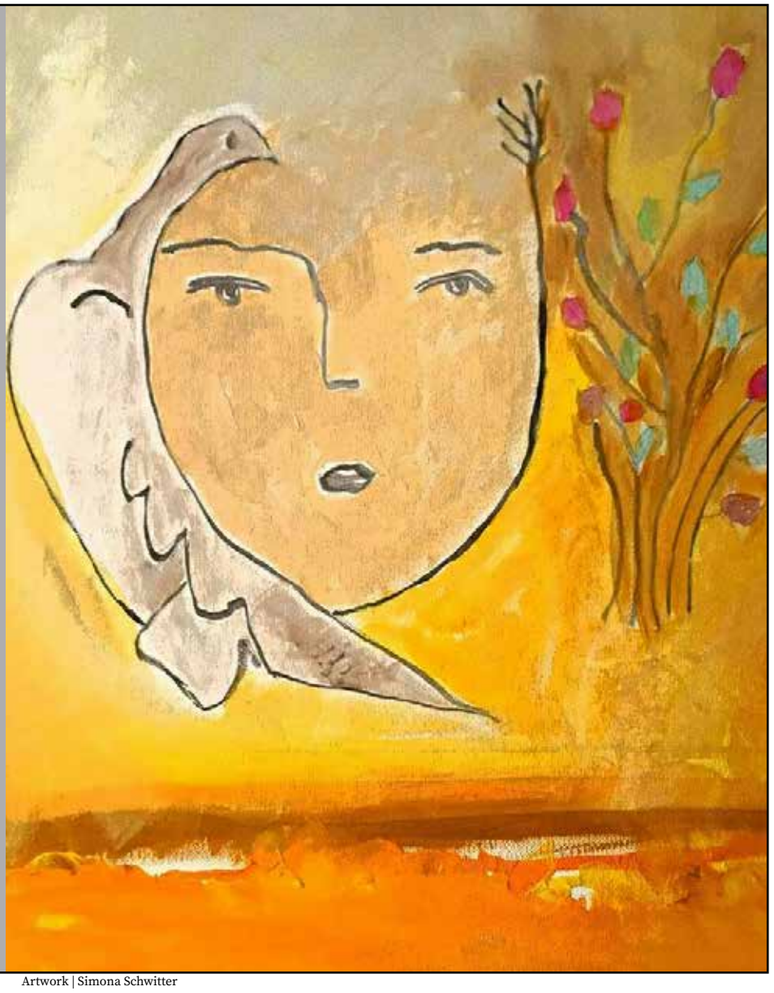
Artwork | Simona Schwitter

Minire Begaj – Balaj, Chairwoman of the government Commission for recognition and verification of the status of survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo

Nothing prepares you for this. Not our training nor our professional experience in our fields. Three years ago, through the Government Commission for Recognition and Verification of the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence during the War, Kosovo institutions began working directly with survivors of sexual violence. Twenty years after the war, we were asking them to share their stories, in order to verify and recognize their status and offer them reparations. Along with eight colleagues from the Commission we received training and guidelines on how to manage the work ahead of us. Most of us had already been part of the process of drafting the regulations. The law that paved the way to the establishment of this Commission was adopted in March 2014 by Kosovo Assembly, after more than a decade of advocacy from the civil society. Even worldwide, the issue of sexual violence during the conflict is still only recently addressed at the institutional level. As such, it still remains uncharted waters, and thus in our case there were only a few practices we could learn from. Yet, we built on all the information and experience we could find, locally and internationally to draft the legal framework necessary to enable us to do our job. The Commission was established in April 2017 and after the necessary budget was allocated and the necessary internal procedures approved, the official application process started in February 2018.

Our mandate was clear, but not easy. We faced numerous challenges in order to bring this mission to life – from having the necessary budget assigned for reparations to other organizational and administrative issues. Yet, nothing can be compared to meeting with the survivors and hearing their stories. I had a lot of experience working with other war categories, yet working with survivors of sexual violence was different. We had taken all the repercussions to ensure that we could do our work efficiently and protect the survivors to the best of our abilities, but we did not think as much about our own emotional and psychological protection. We weren't just reading difficult stories. We were reading about heinous and inhumane crimes, which constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. We were meeting the survivors. We could see the pain in their eyes, the scars in their bodies, and hear about their horrendous experiences, their sufferings after the war, their health issues resulting from the sexual violence, their family issues and the persisting stigma they had to live with. We became also witnesses of their economic difficulties, as most of them don't work, and the hardships that the stigma of the families and communities imposed over them.

In each meeting we heard horrific experiences and a lot of untreated trauma. Personally, it has been very difficult and it distorted my sense of reality. As a woman



Artwork | Simona Schwitter

and a mother of two children it was heartbreaking for me to think that live in a world where such horrific crimes happen. But I found strength their strength, in their courage to leave their pain and suffering aside and plead for their right by becoming part of this process. Many women, men, girls, and boys turned their experiences into strength and courage to move forward, for the sake of their families, their children, finding the strength to survive and lastly to be part of the verification and recognition process. The journey addressing sexual violence during the conflict has been incredibly difficult and painful for our country. Yet, we have made progress in terms increasing awareness and empathy the survivors and offering them recognition and reparations. Still, there's more to be done in order to offer them a life in dignity which they deserve. We need to continue working on access to justice, dealing with the stigma, psycho-social support, and better access to the healthcare and welfare services they need, and offer support for their educational and economic empowerment. Access to justice is a deep open wound for us, given that there hasn't been a single conviction all the documented cases of sexual violence during the war in the past twenty years. The impunity for the perpetrators has kept the survivors in anguish for all this time, and only when justice will be served, they will find peace. Beyond the legal aspect of the work we do as part of the Commission, I believe that our mandate is humane and our commitment is noble, which is why we have always used a survivors-centered approach and remain dedicated to understand them and support them in any way we can. For the past three years, we have put the survivors at the center of all our work, recognizing how hard it is for them to share their stories and return to their traumatic experiences. For us, doing a good job is not just professionally rewarding. It is foremost a moral, human fulfillment at the personal level, and we feel privileged to be at their service.

I am proud that Kosovo is now regarded as good practice for the institutional response it used to address the survivors of sexual violence during the war. It does not just speak about the work of the Commission and the stakeholders involved, mainly the licensed NGOs that support our work. It speaks more loudly about our survivors. They are so brave that twenty years after the war they gather the courage to come to us and share their stories. Very often they have to hide the reparations they receive from the government in an effort to protect their secret from their families. Yet, they came to us, enabling us to go through this process together, paving the way for survivors in other countries, whose institutions can build on the work that is done in Kosovo and find the best way to approach and address the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in their societies.

To date we have recognized the status of 934 survivors. We will continue to be at the service of all the survivors, ready to hear their stories, to be there for them, and offer them the least we can do after 22 years – verification of their status as survivors and the reparations that come with it.

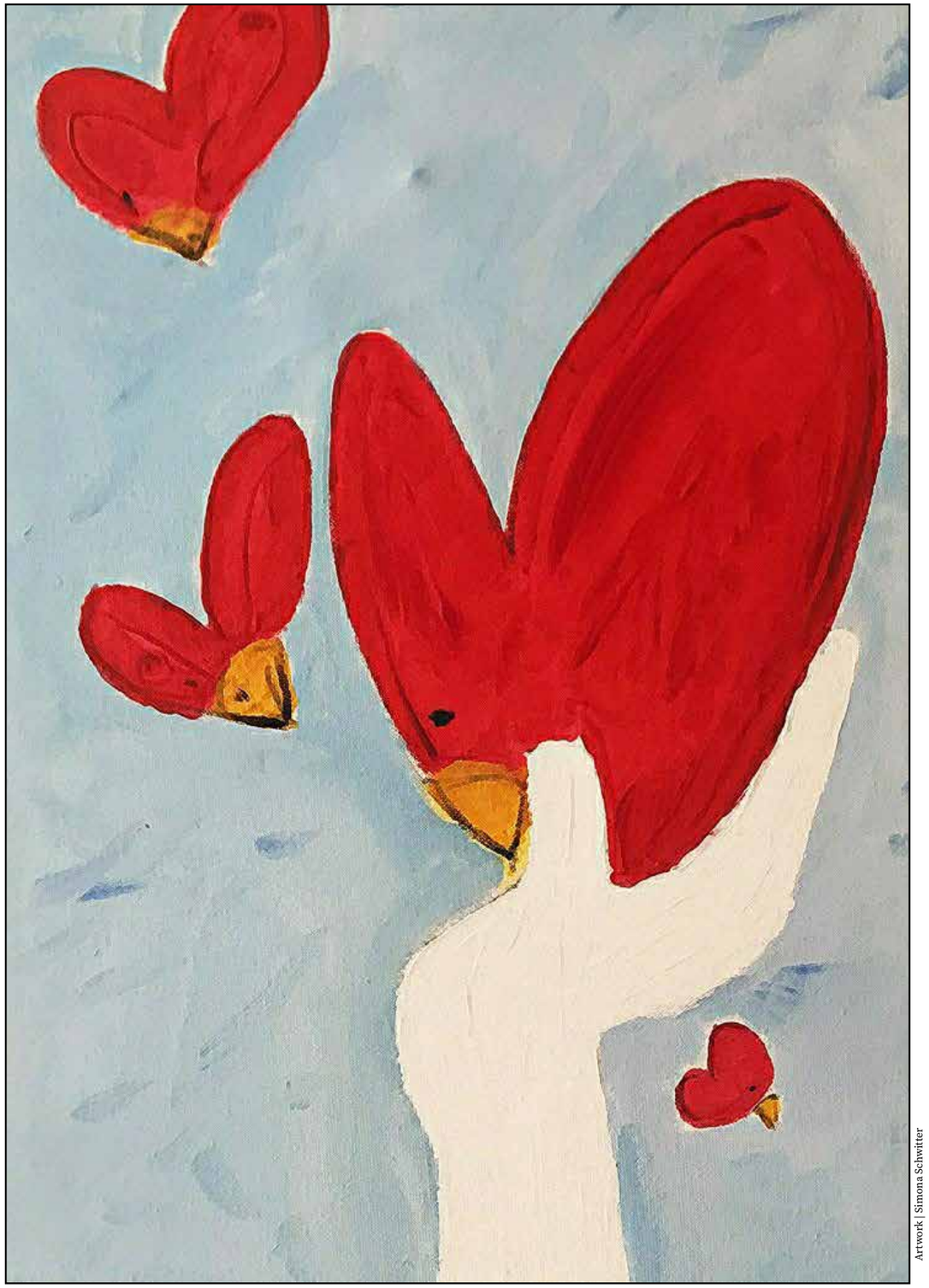
Mirlinda Sada, Executive Director of Medica Gjakova, Kosovo

Photo | Besa Domi

The work we do at Medica Gjakova is not a job. It is a mission. It is emotionally daunting and fulfilling at the same time. We work countless hours and remain at the service of the survivors we work for – there to support them, to speak up when they can't, there to fight for them. The aftermath of the Kosovo war was devastating – we buried so many people that were brutally murdered, saw our homes in ashes, did everything we could to heal our injured loved ones, and looked everywhere we could for the missing people. We continue to grieve our losses and unfortunately, we still continue to look for loved ones that are still missing 22 years later. But we did not know much about one of the most horrific crimes that had happened. The one with the longest lasting impact and the power to tear down our social fabric. The sexual violence during the war. This vicious crime had changed the lives of about 20,000 girls, boys, women, and men. It forced them into silence, living with the weight of their secret over their shoulders. Women were mainly the target of this crime, and as such the ones to endure its horrific consequences. It made women feel guilty and worthless, it put mothers in a position to not be able to take care of themselves and their children, and it made young girls feel unworthy of being loved and being a wife and a mother.

When the war ended, we all cherished the freedom we longed for. But they did not. They were captivated by the fear of protecting their secret in an effort to spare themselves and their families from the stigma. I learned about the power of the sexual violence during the war and its consequences in 1999, when Dr. Monika Hauser, Founder and Director of Medica Mondiale opened the first interdisciplinary center in Gjakova, Kosovo. Since then we have supported thousands of survivors. In 2011, we officially registered Medica Gjakova as a non-governmental organization in Kosovo. What started as psychosocial treatment and gynecological check-up, became an incredible support system for the survivors and their families, which then continued to offer legal aid and resources for economic empowerment.

We initially started with gynecological check-up through mobile ambulances enabling us to go to them and offer them care. These visits have opened the door to psychosocial treatments. Fast forward to now, the check-ups are offered through the health center, and they come directly to us for therapy and guidance. In addition to the services focused on welfare, the legal aid sector within our organization has helped survivors transfer the guilt they carry on their shoulders to the actual perpetrators responsible for the crime. While we understand that what happened is not their fault, understanding this is an individual milestone for most survivors. This sector also supports survivors in other matters requiring protection of their rights through the legal channels. Economic empowerment of survivors is also at the heart of Medica Gjakova. By empowering them to earn their own income



Artwork | Simona Schwitter

The images correspond to
Art of Survivors

we enable them to be financially independent, which also makes them stronger. Within this sector we carry out capacity building activities and support them in their entrepreneur initiatives. We also have our own social enterprise, which is rich with products made by survivors. Through this interdisciplinary approach we have made considerable efforts to heal, empower, and reintegrate survivors in the society. We have also worked with institutions, continually advocating for their proactive engagement in the matter. It took years for Kosovo institutions to take actions at the institutional level. Initially we hit the wall as we were confronted with denial and negligence of the matter. This further stigmatized and isolated the survivors, but it also fueled our fight for them. The stigma took away the voice of the survivors, but it made us as civil society organizations speak as loud as we can on their behalf. Years of advocacy led to institutional engagement, and our work together has resulted in a change in society. When we speak of survivors, we now use empathy instead of denial, which is a significant milestone for our society. The stigma has more power when we are silent. The more we talk about it, the more we empathize, and the more we fight for survivors, the stigma loses its power and the humanity of the survivors is restored. Through the campaign Be my voice, we gave voice to survivors of sexual violence during the war. The flower Anemone known for its endurance has become a symbol of the campaign and a symbol hope for the 20,000 survivors. The campaign has brought together friends and supporters, who wear the Anemone pin in their chest and thus share the load of the weight that the survivors carry. The book "I am Anemone" is also part of the campaign. The book is a collection of 25 powerful stories of survivors of sexual violence during the war, who have used this book as a platform to raise their voice. In the past 22 years, we have worked tirelessly for the survivors. We did everything we could to improve their lives within their families and communities, but also to create a legal framework that protects and recognizes them. Now, the survivors have the right for recognition of their status and access to reparations. And while there has been a lot of progress, we are not close to done.

Access to justice will continue to be at the core of our fight. The pain of the survivors will be relieved only when the perpetrators get justice for what they have done, and we are ready to continue the fight until they cherish the freedom we have just as much as the rest of us do. We all owe this to them, and it is way overdue.

Drita Hajdari, Prosecutor, Kosovo Special Prosecutor, Kosovo

Photo | Besa Domi

As a Prosecutor, being strong is a critical part of the job. We face difficult situations and unspeakable crimes, and our mission is to bring justice for these cases. Regardless the crime, we have to remain professional, focus on the investigation and facts, and ensure that the victims get some relief from justice being served. With decades serving as a prosecutor, I have learned to manage my emotions in sensitive cases and keep my eye on the investigation. Yet, when working with survivor of sexual violence I had to work with myself to become emotionally stronger, to serve them as they deserve. It was not easy to hear horrific stories of rape in front of children and family members, see the scars and injuries throughout their bodies, or hear that they would have rather died than experienced what they did. But as a prosecutor, they need me to be strong and fight fiercely for their justice, which is exactly what I have done and will continue to do for as long as I serve in this position.

War crimes and particularly sexual violence during the war continue to be a significant challenge for justice in Kosovo. After the war, we have had two powerful missions for rule of law, UNMIK and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), before the matter was handed over to Kosovo authorities. And even with these resources we are still behind in serving justice for the horrific war crimes committed in Kosovo. In the end of 2018, we finalized the transfer of cases of war crimes form the mission of EULEX to the Kosovo Special Prosecutor. By then, the Special Prosecutor inherited about 900 cases of war crime and around 2,000 cases of missing people. Among the war crimes, we noticed there were very few cases of sexual violence during the war. With the weight of the social stigma in their shoulders, very few survivors had reported this vicious crime. Aside from the social part, it was very difficult for them to share their stories to international investigators, through translators. In addition, these missions did not have designated procedures to protect the identity of the survivors or ensure them protection. In the few cases that survivors reported this crime, they felt that they were on their own, as they did not have institutional protection. When we received the mandate to prosecute war crimes, we gave priority to cases of sexual violence during the war. We assigned female prosecutors and police investigators to these cases, given that the vast majority of the victims were women. By doing so, we aimed to make the process of collecting the testimony more comfortable for them. In addition, we decided to have the interviews in the premises of NGOs that serve them, in the presence of a therapist. This way we offered them a safer space to share their stories. Survivors also are granted a professional representative from the Chamber of Lawyers of Kosovo, who ensures that their legal rights are protected. In addition, at the initial phase of the investigation, the prosecutor of the case requests an order for anonymity from the court, which ensures that the identity of the survivor is protected in the public eye, and throughout all procedures the survivor is referred to with a designated code. The penal procedures in these cases are closed to the public. These practices have increased the protection of survivors, and as such have increased their trust in the institutions of the prosecutor.

This was reflected through the increased number of cases reported. There has been progress in addressing the stigma and increasing awareness about sexual violence during the war. As a society we have learned to shift the guilt from the survivors to the actual perpetrators, who used rape as a strategy in war. It was not easy to get here, and we still have a lot to do to ensure that our survivors get justice and live a life in dignity as they deserve. We have to admit – even with all the progress, this remains a sensitive topic for us. That is why a lot of survivors of sexual violence during the war still hesitate to report their cases and face their past. This is a challenge for us in terms of identifying, recording, and initiating penal investigations for these crimes. Investigating these cases is just as difficult as initiating them. Most war criminals are in Serbia, and it is very challenging for us to run our investigations. In order to do so, it is imperative to have regional cooperation in addressing war crimes, and particularly cooperation with Serbia. The cooperation with Serbia should be raised at the international level. The accountability of war criminals and the justice for the victims depend on it. Only when we deal with our past, and hold those responsible accountable, we can open a new chapter in Kosovo and the region – one in which we can live in peace and work towards the prosperity we deserve.

Artwork | Simona Schwitter

Vlora Tuzi Nushi, Head of Office, and Rozafa Kelmendi, Project Manager on Transitional Justice, - UN Women Project Office Kosovo

Photo | Besa Domi

Placing the rights, needs and aspirations of CRSV survivors at the center of programming on access to justice.

Nearly 23 years after hostilities ceased in 1998-1999, a culture of shame and silence in Kosovo continues to stigmatize survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Survivors' quest for justice was supported by UN Women, which since 2006 has been working with civil society organizations and Kosovo authorities, and helped to secure legal recognition and redress for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The UN Women programming under the leadership of Flora Macula (former Head of Office) supported nationally owned and led efforts on criminal justice and reparations, while centering the needs and demands of survivors for holistic support, with the goal to develop an adjusted set of norms that recognizes the crimes that survivors experienced and empower them to access reparations and legal redress. The centrality of survivors in the design and implementation of reparation measures was ensured with UN Women support through consultations and participation throughout the process.

Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

After the Kosovo Assembly in March 2014 approved a law that gave legal recognition to victims of sexual violence during Kosovo's armed conflict, UN Women provided integral support to the Office of President Atifete Jahjaga, government and victim's associations to establish Kosovo's reparations programme and supported the establishment of the government Commission to Recognize and Verify Survivors of Sexual Violence during the Kosovo War:

- Support to the Kosovo authorities' efforts to design and implement reparation measures by providing financial and technical assistance, and ensuring compliance with international human-rights norms and standards, as well as good practices from Wester Balkans;

- Designated four NGOs based on pre-determined criteria to provide psychosocial support for survivors;

- Developed and implement a standardized training curriculum and codes of conduct for the Commission and NGO service providers;

Justice Processes

With the financial support of the European Union, under the guidance and technical support from UN Women Peace and Security Division, UN Women Kosovo in 2016 commissioned a study to complement the existing initiatives in Kosovo with updated research, focused on bringing survivor voices and perspectives to the forefront of future policy and programme design. Approximately 75% of the survivors who participated in the focus groups in Kosovo expressed hopes to see the prosecution of offenders of sexual violence. Through the Gender-Sensitive Transitional Justice project, funded by the European Union, UN Women Kosovo has facilitated mentoring support from international criminal law experts to prosecutors and investigators in Kosovo. UN Women's support to the prosecutors and police, together with our partners Justice Rapid Response and Transitional Justice Clinic, supported by Canada, was integral to securing the indictment. The role of women organizations was important provided psychosocial and legal assistance to the survivors. In a historic step toward accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, the first landmark indictment on conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo by the Special Prosecution Office of Kosovo, took place in March 2020. In January 2021, survivor appeared in court at the first hearing of the case against her abuser, after over 21 years waiting to see the perpetrator held accountable in domestic court. The support continues in the pursuit of gender justice to ensure that the survivors are treated with dignity, that their voices are heard in the quest for justice, and the Rome Statute is used to bring perpetrators to justice and deter future crimes.

Pilot Programme Linking Reparations and Development

In 2017, in cooperation with Kosovo Women's Network and four organizations specialized in treating survivors of sexual violence, 177 survivors of CRSV benefitted from micro-economic grants, administered through four local victims' associations. The micro-grants were part of a UN Women pilot project to link reparations provided through the Verification Commission to development programmes, to enhance the transformative impact of reparations. Though individual micro-grants were small, they had a powerful and sustainable impact, Results include transformative changes in the form of increased independence, autonomy, improved familial relations and general well-being, and a renewed sense of hope for life and the future, including impact on the reparations process.

Countering the Stigma of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence through Survivor-Led Advocacy

The public dialogue in Kosovo around conflict-related sexual violence has shifted dramatically over the past several years, with political recognition of the experiences of survivors and their demands for justice, and civil society and survivor-led advocacy for justice and shifting the stigma from survivors to perpetrators. UN Women played a role in encouraging this change, by creating space for survivors to speak to the public, and take on a leadership role, supporting survivors to restore their rights and dignity and destigmatize sexual violence.

Guarantees of Non-Repetition through Education and Youth Engagement

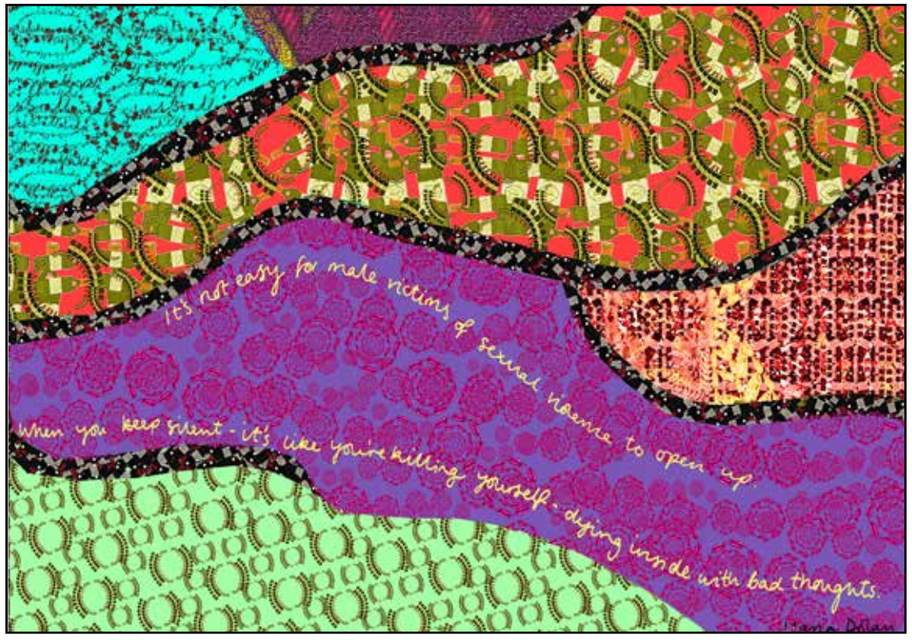
Education and civic engagement on human rights, peacebuilding and gender equality is a key component of fostering a culture of guarantees of non-recurrence as a form of transitional justice. In Kosovo, with the youngest population in Europe, education and youth engagement on transitional justice are critical. With support from the UN Women and the European Union (EU), in May 2018, the University of Pristina established a Transitional Justice Resource Center, which aims to enhance the role of education in transitional justice processes and peace-building, build understanding of human rights, and establish the conditions necessary for reconciliation.

Photo | UN Women

THESE TESTIMONIES ARE FACILITATED THROUGH THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT COMMISSION TO RECOGNIZE AND VERIFY SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE DURING THE KOSOVO WAR AND THE JAHJAGA FOUNDATION

46-year-old female, survivor of sexual violence during the war, Kosovo. The survivor did not want to disclose her name or use a pseudonym. Instead, she preferred to use the case number (1974) in the database of the Government Commission to Recognize and Verify Survivors of Sexual Violence During the Kosovo War.

On 13 April 1999, my family was fleeing to safety when we were stopped by a group of heavily armed Serbian police officers and Roma civilians. Facing threats to our lives, my husband and his two brothers who were all wearing the Kosovo Liberation Army uniform fought them, until their ammunition ran out. The three of them were killed and along with another brother who was wounded. They were put into the trailer of a truck. Then, the police officers returned for us. Initially, they demanded that we give them all the gold and the money we had, and they took it all. After that, they began to beat us and demanded that we take off our clothes. If we didn't do what they demanded, then they threatened to behead our children. Calling us a family of terrorists, they cut off our clothes with their knives, undressed us, and began to rape us in front of the children and the uncle of my husband. I was six months pregnant. They made cuts in my face and my stomach and said that they would kill the little terrorist in me, since they already killed his father. They pushed the automatic rifle into my face and broke all my teeth. Even in that condition, with blood all over my face and my stomach, they still brutally raped me. I was in insufferable pain. The niece of my mother-in-law had an additional 1,000 Deutsche Marks that they initially did not find. She gave them the money, begging them to not kill us too. After they raped me, they took my two sons to look at the dead bodies. They beat them and demanded that my sons identify which of the "terrorists" was their father. Thankfully, my sons did not know their father. My husband was forced to flee to Switzerland six months after we got married. He was politically persecuted by the UDBA, the secret police of the time. Every six month he would come to Albania, and then cross the border illegally to come home. Even when he was there, he would not stay at home during the day, as the police would come looking for him. That is why my sons did not recognize him in the pile of bodies. I still don't know how we made it out alive or how my baby survived. Right after giving birth, I took my baby to Lyon, France for a 'change of blood', as I was terrified that there would be consequences from the rape. The years following the war were incredibly difficult, and the stigma I felt was unbearable. Even though what happened was against my will, I still felt guilty. I was in such a difficult position with my physical and mental health, that in 2008 my psychotherapist recommended that I change my residence. The stigma and the memories of the event made it impossible for me to continue living there. I have been seeking justice since the war ended. I first reported my case to the United Nations Mission in Kosovo in August 1999, and then again to the EULEX Mission in 2014. In 2017, I also reported my case to the Unit for Investigation of War Crimes within the Kosovo Police. In my testimony, I shared what happened and the names of the perpetrators but there were no actions taken towards obtaining justice for me and for my family. And we need that. Only justice can alleviate our pain and suffering.



41-year-old male survivor of sexual violence during the war Kosovo. The survivor did not want to disclose his name or use a pseudonym. Instead, he preferred to use the case number (757) in the database of the Government Commission to Recognize and Verify Survivors of Sexual Violence During the Kosovo War.

In the early morning of 29 May 1999, Serbian forces surrounded us and beat my father and myself in front of the entire family. They then put us in a car and took us to an apartment, where they beat us heavily, deprived us from food and water, forced us to carry heavy items, and at the end of the day made us sing. We were there for two days but it felt like an eternity. Then they parted us and took me to the prison in Lipjan, beating me along the way. There they continued with torture and food deprivation for five days. By then, I was hurt, weak, and tired. On the fifth day, they took us out, saying that they have orders to kill us from Milosevic. Shortly, a second order came through demanding us to be taken to Serbia. We were pushed in a bus towards the prison of Pozharevac, where the police were grouped in the two sides of the hall, beating us with batons as we were taken to our rooms. I remember that when I got to the room, I began crying wishing for death. After a while I got very sick from all the physical abuse I had endured. I went to one of the police to ask for help. He handed me over to two other police officers, who first beat me with batons and automatic rifles in prison, and then along the drive to the hospital. At the hospital, after the check up, I was put in a room with Serbian prisoners, who hurt me physically calling me an Albanian terrorist. Later I was sent to the central prison of Belgrade. I got very sick again, and this time I spent two weeks at the hospital there. When I returned, the torture began from the drug addicted Serbian inmates in my room. They gave me a Serbian name, forced me to speak their language, and abused me physically and psychologically as they pleased.

Among others, they took the tail of a broom and they inserted it up to my colon. I had insufferable pain and screamed for help, but when the guardian came, he beat me for the noise. Throughout my stay there, I was raped, tortured, beaten, pushed into forced labor, and endured intense psychological abuse. This continued even when I was taken back to the prison in Pozharevac, and only ended when I was released on 9 June 2020. I live with this experience, cognizant of the stigma around it. I do not feel comfortable in the environment that I live in. I feel that everyone knows what happened to me, and even though it was against my will, I still feel guilty. After the war, life continued somehow. I work, which has been very helpful for my mental health. In fact, my work gave me a sense of normalcy even during the COVID-19 pandemic. I have been working throughout it. I really don't know what I would have done if I didn't, and if I would have had to experience lockdown. I shared my story with several entities, including the EULEX Mission, where I reported my case in 2014. Yet, I haven't received any information since then. So, my journey and longing for justice continue.

THESE TESTIMONIES ARE FACILITATED THROUGH THE COOPERATION BETWEEN MEDICA GJAKOVA AND THE JAHJAGA FOUNDATION

39-year-old female survivor of sexual violence during the war, Kosovo. The survivor did not want to use a pseudonym. Instead, she preferred to use the initials of her first and last name (H.A).

During the Kosovo war, I was 18 years old. I was married and living with my husband and his family of four, including his mother and siblings. I had just had my first child - a baby girl who was only five weeks old. I remember constantly living in fear during that period. I was afraid of all the loud noises, the gunshots, and of the police and military that we would see in the street the few times we went out. The news about people being killed and houses burned to ashes further exacerbated my fear. One evening in May 1999, four heavily armed police officers barged into our home. They first attacked my husband: they removed the shoelaces from his shoes so that they could tie his hands, and then two of them took him into the other room. My mother-in-law tried to stop them, but there was nothing she could do. From where we were staying, we could hear him scream in pain from all the beating. While we were hearing his screams of anguish, two officers grabbed me. I had my daughter in my hands, but that did not stop them. My mother-in-law, in an effort to save my daughter, took her from me. The police officers grabbed my hair and dragged me towards the hay in our yard, kicking and beating me along the way. I screamed at the top of my lungs, but no one came to help. They kept beating me and started tearing off my clothes. Then they brutally raped me, one after another. They looked so similar; I could not tell them apart. They were drunk and the smelled of liquor was nauseating. After they were done, they called the other two police officers who were beating my husband and told them to have a go at me. They did everything they wanted to my body – the body of an 18-year-old who had just given birth five weeks earlier. They left, leaving me on the ground. Afraid that they would return, I mustered all the strength that I could gather to enter my home and to check if my daughter was alive. There I saw my mother-in-law looking lost. In her condition, she took me to the bathroom to clean my blood and my wounds. I was so weak that she put my clothes, dressing me, as if I were a child. As we both cried, she told me that they had raped her too. Then I took my daughter in my arms. I held on to her tight, crying. I kept thinking – had we known that they would mess with women, we would have run away. From there, I went to the room where my husband was. He was laying there, bleeding and swollen from all the beating. As he looked at me, he knew what had happened, but he didn't ask anything. I told him the truth gradually. First, I told him that they had beaten me. Then, I told him that one of them raped me. And then I told him that all of them had raped me. He never blamed me. In fact, has always supported me and stayed by my side, helping me to move forward.

Soon we left Kosovo and went to Montenegro, where we stayed for four years. Coming back here was incredibly difficult for me – I felt afraid, stressed, and continually had nightmares. Whenever I went out, I had the feeling that everyone knew what had happened to me, and that they were looking at me. I found peace when I joined the group of survivors that soon became my friends. I never thought that I could find help. I actually believed that what happened to me didn't happen to anyone else, and being a Roma, I thought that no one would care. But they care, and hearing their stories helped me understand that I was not alone in this anguish.

When I had the opportunity, I applied for recognition of my status as a survivor of sexual violence during the war, and my application was approved. I was both happy and sad about it. On the upside, I receive more income which helps me and my family. But on the other hand, every month when I receive the pension, I remember the war and everything that happened. It seems that no matter what happens, the war will never end for us - the survivors of sexual violence during the war.

The lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic brought even more vivid memories of the war, and it has been exceedingly difficult to bear. In addition to the memories, I have been constantly worried about the health of my family and about our economic situation. Thankfully, my friends from the group of survivors ensured that we would stay in touch virtually. It was not the same, but at least we felt the warmth and support of one another.

The lack of justice is a hole in my heart, but I am not ready to report my case to the authorities. I have reached a point where I believe that one day maybe I could report my case, but until then I will continue to live with this hole, which has become a part of me.

Photo | borislavkiprin

42-year-old female, survivor of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. The survivor did not want to use a pseudonym. Instead, she preferred to use the initials of her first and last name (P.Sh.)

UN Photo | UNHCR Roger LeMoyne

In April 1999, I was 20 years old. I had found love and had recently gotten engaged, and I was planning my future with high hopes. This vision quickly changed in a way I could never foresee. As the war in Kosovo escalated, with civilians being brutally killed, raped, and injured, and with homes being burned to ashes, my father made the decision to leave our home with my sister and me. We were young, and he feared that we would be a target of harm. The three of us left home to join a crowd of people walking for miles towards Albania. We left our mother, brother and other sister behind, with the hope that we would reunite in better and safer times. We started our journey at night, and we could barely see the path forward. We kept stumbling along the way. Initially, we thought there were a lot of stumps in the area, but we soon figured out that we were stumbling over dead bodies. Upon realizing this, my sister fainted immediately. Before we could continue our journey, shots were fired. I fell, not fully aware of the extent of my injuries. In the darkness, I saw my sister next to me, with a bullet in her forehead. The shots continued until dawn. That's when the soldiers came checking through the bodies and found me. I was wounded in both my legs, one hand, and my shoulder. They put me on a plank and took me to a house close by. Before I left, I saw my father in the stack of bodies. At that house I was given pills, after which they started to remove the bullets with their knives. Due to the insufferable pain, I lost my consciousness. I woke up in a hospital, but I was not safe. Although severely wounded, I remained at the disposal of all the soldiers that wanted me. They told me that I was the woman of all the soldiers there. I would ask for help, but no one would help me. They would put alcohol over my body, give me pills, and tell me that they're just going to leave me there to die. I don't even know how many times they raped me. Most times I would lose consciousness. But I remember that they came in groups of three or four, and would rape me brutally, one after another. They were drugged and drunk and would smell horribly. I lost track of the days and months. At all times, I would just lay there in that hospital room, with only one sheet covering my body, at the mercy of the people who didn't have any. When the war ended, they found me alone in my room. I had become unrecognizable, to the point that my own sister did not recognize me. She entered the room I was in and said that I wasn't her sister. I was taken to Germany for recovery. After months of treatment, I came back to Kosovo, but not back to my old life. I was still injured in my hands and legs. And my fiancé did not even want to meet with me.

Even after everything I had been through, there was one repeated question from everyone I knew that still haunts me "How come you are still alive?!" Every time I was asked that question, I felt ashamed for being alive, as if I shouldn't have been. This often instilled the idea that maybe it would be better if I wasn't alive, if I killed myself. But, the more I heard that, the stronger I wanted to be. I didn't want anyone to see me cry, to see me weak. I pulled my strength for the people I loved. I took care of my mother while she was alive and I have been taking care of my loved ones whenever I could. I believe that the strength to take care of others, even though I need help and care, is what makes me special. When I joined the group of survivors, I told them why I think I am special and then shared my story. It was incredibly difficult for me to join this group in the first place, but when I did and when I shared my story, I was able to cry. I hadn't cried in years. I never thought I would share my story. I believed that it would die with me. I never even told my own mother. But I did tell it to my new friends at the group of survivors, and later I told it to four of my nephews and nieces. They were shocked, but they stood by me, and said that they would be there for me whenever I'm ready to share it with other members of the family and maybe even speak publicly to the world. Before meeting other survivors, I thought that what happened to me had not happened to anyone else. When I heard the stories of other survivors and when I shared mine, I felt a relief. I wasn't alone. I had lifted the weight that burdened me. I started a new life. I have also shared my story with the government commission for recognition of the status of survivors of sexual violence during the war, and they have approved my request for recognition. Now, along with my verified status as a survivor, I receive the reparations in the form of monthly pension. That is the only income I have. One day, I hope to have the strength to seek justice for what was done to me. But I wouldn't even know where to start. There were so many people involved, that I'm not sure I could identify all of them. I don't even know their names. And while I yearn for justice and for them to get punished for what they have done, I could never imagine going to court alone. Maybe I could if my friends from the survivors group did the same.

The lockdown required because of the COVID-19 pandemic brought back so many flashbacks. I never thought that I would experience lockdown again. But while it was difficult, it is not like the lockdown in the war. The pandemic was sent to us by God. There is a big difference when the pain and suffering is caused by people. That is much harder because you keep asking yourself "why?".

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY THE KOSOVA REHABILITATION CENTRE FOR TORTURE VICTIMS (KRCT)

I am Feride Rushiti, Medical Doctor and Executive Director of the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims. My journey of activism on behalf of survivors of wartime sexual violence began in 1998, in the refugee camps of Kukës, Albania, during a very critical time of my nation facing terror and atrocities from Milosevic's regime. I was a newly qualified doctor volunteering to help treat civilian victims of war who were expelled from Kosovo during these times of ethnic cleansing campaigns. By the end of spring the following year, tens of thousands of Albanian women and men would be raped by Serbian policemen and soldiers as well as by paramilitaries. I couldn't have imagined that this fate of my people would turn into the cause of my life. I had no idea what was ahead of me but seeing the immense suffering and dire need of the refugees for support, I felt compelled to get involved by the same drive that pushed me to study medicine in the first place: the desire to alleviate human suffering. The profession I had chosen, and especially its humane dimension, was being tested in the most extreme variant. When I look back now, I can see the crowded camp: People huddling together, exhausted and terrorized. Young children, afraid and confused. Some were wounded, missing limbs, missing parents...I saw women mourning their dead husbands, keeping their children close. Elderly people stunned into an eerie silence... Scenes I had only ever seen in WW2 documentaries, became my daily life for months on end. All around us there was the echo of violence. The camps lived and breathed trauma! My work at the camp has left an indelible mark on my personality and perspective about my role in society. Being passive in the face of brutality was not an option anymore. That's when I understood that any pretense of neutrality was an unjustifiable bias. Hearing hundreds of stories of human suffering, each of them has touched me, but the cries of the rape survivors will forever echo in my mind. Their pain was buried under the oppressive layers of social stiegma, while other victims received at least acceptance if not the help they needed.

After the war, I returned to Kosovo along with the returnee wave, and facing the unmet demands of the survivors whom I had already met in the camps and others I hadn't met, compelled me to put together efforts with my colleagues and establish an organization that would provide for a safe space where the survivors would be heard. I founded The Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims in September 1999, and at that time it was the only place where they were accepted and provided much needed psychosocial and medical aid. From 1999 until now, my career has been constantly shaped by the survivors' stories and challenges which guided our intervention approach towards the multiple dimensions of their trauma.

Because it was unthinkable for most survivors to speak openly about their stories, I had to become the face of thousands of unseen faces and speak on behalf of unheard voices. Representing survivors has been a heavy responsibility, but also a crucial necessity, because our patriarchal society was very eager to erase this crime from history so as not to face the difficult feelings of shame and powerlessness. Just like in post-WW2 Germany, where thousands of German women who were raped by Soviet soldiers went unheard by society, in Kosovo too there was resistance towards accepting and recognizing survivors of wartime sexual violence. Furthermore, among the survivors there were men as well. This conflicts with the social mores and its value system, besides being a complex psychological and cultural phenomenon which we recognize from similar situations in postwar countries around the world. In order to discourage stigma and promote acceptance, we undertook numerous campaigns to raise awareness. From 2012, with the launch of our first campaign "Hear My Voice" we prepared the grounds for substantial changes of the institutional approach towards legal recognition and support of the survivors from the state. The implementation of this and the subsequent campaign "Be My Voice" launched in 2018, involved working together with state institutions, civil society, academia, the artistic community, youth and the general public.

After many years of persistent advocacy for legal recognition of survivors, in 2014 we finally were successful in persuading the parliament of Kosovo to amend the law to include survivors of wartime sexual violence as a category among civilian victims of war. This was a major victory because it was the first decisive action of the state in support of survivors by providing remedies, which was a step towards social justice and restoring the dignity of survivors. Working for and with survivors of wartime sexual violence has taught me to develop a sensitive approach and to create a partnership with them in our joint battle for rehabilitation, reintegration, and empowered demands for justice. They are all unique individuals, with different needs, talents and potential. Therefore, the approach towards empowering them has to be customized. I am very proud of the progress of our beneficiaries, some of whom have become prominent leaders, respected by the community in one of the most patriarchal areas in Kosovo. They serve other survivors as a role model of the unbreakable human spirit and empowering them socio-economically.

After more than two decades of working in this field, the landscape has changed for the better. There is concrete and growing institutional support, not limited to administrative reparation. Today, there is a higher level of awareness in society, in large part thanks to the public speaking of some of our bravest survivors such as Vasfije Krasniqi Goodman who is now a member of Parliament of the Kosovo Assembly, and Shyrete Tahiri-Sulimani. Through overcoming their pain and through their public testimonies, they inspire other survivors inside and outside of Kosovo to speak up and ask for help and justice, while also consequently transforming the perceptions of the society about them. But still there are walls to be broken down. Limited access to justice and impunity of perpetrators continues to keep the wounds of survivors fresh. So far, there has not been a single case of sentencing of a perpetrator, and that needs to change if we are to have a sustainable healing process. Beyond healing for the direct survivors, we have to acknowledge that wartime rape marks the lives of their families and the second generation as well. Working toward understanding and attenuating the effects of secondary and transgenerational trauma is one of the priorities of our work. The effects of trauma reverberate throughout the community and society at large, so our work in rehabilitation is multidimensional and holistic, having a profound role in healing a society marred by collective trauma. Myself and the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims will continue to be the strongest allies of the survivors of wartime sexual violence until justice is served and they find peace in their hearts. I hope that the humane dimension of our work will universalize its values and aims.

UN Photo | HJ Davies

I am Blerina (not real name). I am 31 years old, married, mother of three children and I live in a village in the North-Eastern part of Kosovo. In April of 1999, I was nine years old. The war had started everywhere in our country. I lived in a small town in the northeastern part of Kosovo. I am the youngest of seven siblings. My mother at that time was suffering from heart disease, and my father decided that my mother, 15-year-old brother and I should leave home and go to our aunt's, in the capital. There, we thought we would be safer. We joined the crowd of people in the convoy and after a long and tiring road where the tractors were driving very slowly, and the people were traveling on foot, just before we reached the capital, there was a small village.

There were gunmen, some with masks on their heads and some with Serbian Army uniforms who stopped the entire convoy of people. There were many of them; initially they separated men and women and began to beat men and boys in front of us. My brother was separated from me and my mother, and we were sent to a school. My mother, out of concern for my brother, fell ill and could not walk. A soldier slammed her to the ground as he pushed me towards the school with the other women. I was horrified! I approached a mother and her daughter who was my age. There was a big room at the school, and members of the Serbian forces began beating women and tearing their clothes. They started raping them, passing them on from one to another. I was shocked! I was a 9-year-old girl and I had never seen anything like it in my life. I was looking for a place to hide, and I had a chair nearby - I huddled under the chair, my eyes closed tight and my ears covered. I did not want to hear the screams of the women and girls and I did not want to see the horror that was happening there. Suddenly I felt someone dragging me by my feet from the chair where I was huddled; I tried to run away, but he, the Serbian soldier, turned me around forcefully and took off my pants, tearing them. He started raping me sexually; it was horrible, I was in excruciating pain and for a moment my whole body was paralyzed - I could not move, I did not understand what was happening to me. Everything seemed foggy, sometimes I was detached from what was happening, and sometimes I heard women screaming.

It did not seem real; it seemed like a bad dream.

Sometimes I would try to move, but he stood over me, and there's a portion of time that I don't remember anything. When I regained consciousness, they were gone. I was naked from the waist down and a woman nearby gave me her sweater and tied it to my body. The soldiers opened the school doors and shouted "Get out, get out faster!" That woman was looking for a way out. I watched and I followed her even though I did not know her. She didn't know me either, but I needed to be close to someone because I had no one of my own there. When we went out in the school yard, I saw my mother. She was standing right there, at the exact place where the soldier had hit her. She had not moved at all, she was waiting for me and when she saw me like that, she started crying and hugged me tight. She just cried, did not say a word...

After the war, my family took good care of me, but we never talked about what happened to me. I have never shared my experience with anyone except my husband. No one in my husband's family knows what happened to me and I try hard to keep my traumatic experience hidden, but I always live in fear that if they find out, they will judge and stigmatize me. Even my husband's parents often told my husband to divorce me because I'm mentally ill, but my husband has never done that because he understands me. I was never aware that there was anyone who could help me with what I had experienced. I never reported it and did not ask for help because I was afraid that everyone might understand what had happened to me and my life would be ruined. In 2015, I migrated illegally to Germany with my husband and children, but the German government sent us back to Kosovo.

However, I was informed about the services of the Kosovo Center for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims in Prishtina, and one day after my return, I requested psycho-social treatment in this center, which I still visit today, and it is only the place where I feel spiritual comfort; I consider it my second home. It is the only place where I can speak freely, feel comfortable and not have the feeling that even the walls have ears. While attending psychological sessions, I was supported by the organization for my travel expenses. In 2018, with the support of KRCT, my status as a victim of sexual violence was recognized by the government's commission for recognition and verification of the status of victims of sexual violence during the war. Since then, I have received a monthly pension worth 230 euros. Although today my psychological state has improved quite a lot, a large part of my recovery will happen when I hear that the abuser is behind bars suffering the punishment he deserves, but I think this will remain just a dream of mine... I would like people not only in my society, but everywhere in the world to understand the victims of sexual violence, to support them and not judge them. None of us have chosen to let this happen to us, and to live every day with such trauma. I dream that one day my children will live in a world without fear or violence.

COVID-19, as a contagious virus, has caused me great fear; and because of the isolation, I cannot attend psychological sessions as regularly as before. Online sessions aren't the same as physical presence.

UN Photo | Roger LeMoyne

UNICEF Photo | Giacomo Pirozzi

I am XXX, I am a 36 years old man and I live in P. with my family. I was 12 years old during the war in Kosovo and together with my family, we left our house as soon as the war started; we moved to different places. After the NATO bombing began on 24 March 1999, we took refuge in Prishtina, in an empty house. For several days I accompanied my mother to buy bread. But at the end of April 1999, on that horrible day, just before lunch, as soon as we left the house, a black car stopped in front of us and two people got out of the car. They were wearing black uniforms, had hats on and spoke Serbian. They shouted at us loudly. We were stunned in the street and they quickly shoved us into the car. They were armed and drove in an unknown direction; I thought they were taking us somewhere to slaughter us. They did not drive long and stopped in an old, two-story house. They dragged us out of the car and put us inside that house; they took us to the second floor and separated me and my mother in different rooms. I started crying and screaming, while hearing my mother's shrieks. One of them would open the door of the room and shout at me to stop crying. They would throw a dry piece of bread at me like a dog, kick me and leave. They often took turns, because there were many members of the Serbian paramilitary forces.

After a while, I could no longer hear my mother's voice, and I thought they had killed her. I heard them singing. In the room where I was, there were two old beds, I was huddled there. One morning, they opened my door and started beating and abusing me. In the evening, three people came to the room in different clothes and stripped me completely, constantly swearing, saying something about "Albanians", that was the only word I understood. Then with a sharp tool, I think a scalpel, they cut my right testicle; I was in excruciating pain and was bleeding a lot. They left me bleeding. I cried out loud in great pain. After a while one of them came and gave me something made of cotton, and I placed it between my legs. I gathered my legs and body to try to stop the bleeding. After a while, one of them put me in the car and sent me to an ambulance. There was a Serbian doctor there who healed my wound and bandaged me. They sent me home again; there I was with my mother and they told us to get out of there or they would kill us. My mother and I had a hard time finding the house where we were staying. When my father saw us, he realized what had happened. We continued to stay in that house until the end of the war.

My life has not been easy at all. After 20 years, I got the courage to tell my traumatic story to the organization KRCT, as I heard a lot in the media about their support for survivors of sexual violence. Although I hesitated at first, because for all those years I had not talked to anyone about my experience. The extremely good treatment that I received relieved me a bit and I trusted their confidentiality. There, I got the courage for life. I consider it my second family, because apart from my parents, I had no one to support me in life.

Because of my experience, I felt different from my peers. My first marriage failed after my wife found out about it and that we could not have children, so she divorced me. I felt very bad, incompetent and stigmatized. Since experiencing the traumatic event, I am spiritually and emotionally hurt, constantly thinking that I am not like others. I really want to have a child of my own and would do everything to make it possible, but they denied me this right. I had health problems and operations on the injured part because of the abuse. My parents took care of my treatment. I received psychological treatment free of charge at KRCT and my transportation costs were also covered, which facilitated my attendance at the center. I have also been supported in applying for the survivor status. So far, I have not had the courage to report my case to the police.

But now I feel empowered since my country has recognized my pain. That is my next goal and I hope that I, as an individual, will find the strength and seek justice, but also our country will seek compensation. I can now say that life is easier for me, it has changed my role in the family, I feel more empowered. I always keep in mind that somewhere we have a door, someone understands our pain. I do not feel alone because I have had the good fortune to meet with others in the organization and we have shared our experiences which made me feel relieved. I appreciate the psychological treatment because I am aware that each of us can recover from the weight of pain and horror experienced. Humans are taught to adapt to the life circumstances as they come, and in the situation with the pandemic I have gone through great difficulties. The lockdown has been a trigger for my trauma, brought back memories of the war and I often felt bad, but online psychological support at KRCT has been very helpful. In economic terms, the restrictions have impacted me as I have been out of work for several months.

My message to all is that "We are evidence that our strength goes beyond human, revival over the horror experienced through no fault of our own is another evidence of human strength."

I am Drita (not real name), I am 54 years old, and I am a mother of three children. When the war started, we left home and moved between places. In the beginning of 1999, we settled in a house with my three children and my mother-in-law. We would get visits from my sister-in-law and my husband's grandmother but mostly it was just us. When we arrived, the Serbian paramilitary forces gave us some cards on how many members we were. They told us they would do daily checks and if any person was missing or added, they would kill us all. We were surrounded by them. The morning after we settled there, five Serbian paramilitaries came. They wore scarves, had painted faces, and carried batons. They broke the door and came inside, as if they wanted to kill us… They told me to make them coffee and food but I had no supplies. One of them, named B, ordered them to bring coffee so they did. I lit two candles and I brewed the coffee on the candle flame. One of them was harassing my 6-year-old daughter, calling her 'Kasandra' and hit her with a birch. After they drank their coffee, they left. That evening, this B. and some others came to our house again. It was very dark; the children were sleeping. When I opened the door, they called me "Srce Moja" and pushed me against the table. My scream woke the children so they closed their bedroom doors. This B. grabbed me and started raping me. Oh God! Oh God! … I fainted, but when I woke up, I had scratches and bruises everywhere. Because it was dark, I don't know if I was raped by more than one person. When I woke up, they were gone, the door was open and it was almost dawn. The next day they came taking turns, asking for coffee, pite (traditional Albanian filo pie) and humiliating us. They drank all the time. In the evening, they showed up again. It was B. again; he came three months in a row. They all raped me in front of my children and my mother-in-law. They even undressed my mother-in-law, harassed, and mocked her. After they did what they pleased, they walked out and left us like that. On the third day, B. and some others came again. He would always bring new soldiers. Before their arrival, I found a dress in that house and put it on my daughter. She was 6 years old. She was sitting when they approached her, touching her legs…I cried and begged them to let her go, she was only a little child. One of them pushed a stick into my daughter's genitals. Blood was gushing down her legs. She was crying and screaming in pain…. It still crushes my soul because my daughter remembers everything… Her bleeding didn't stop for three days.

They came to our house every day for the first three months while we were there. The army never harmed us, but the police and the paramilitaries harassed us every day. Eventually, I got tired. We were near the checkpoint of the Serbian army and I went there and asked them to help stop the abuse. They told me to go to the police commander for help. When I went to him and begged for help, he told me: "Don't tell them I sent you but go to R. M's house and ask for commander S. of the paramilitaries". When I went there the next day, they mistreated and interrogated me but ultimately, they sent me away without helping. I had nothing to hang on to.

Two months into the ordeal, in the beginning of February I found out I was pregnant. My mother-in-law said it was bound to happen. I was suicidal so I mixed some bread yeast with water and drank it. By the evening, I felt very bloated. In that condition, Serbs came inside and started raping me like every other night. Around midnight, I had excruciating pain. I was bloating by the minute. In the morning, I started bleeding, I was crying and screaming. In that awful condition, they continued abusing me sexually. The next evening, while in the bathroom, I realized I had aborted. The paramilitary group of B and the police group of Xh. tortured us daily for three months until the NATO bombings, and the other three months they continued but not as often. My sister-in-law would visit her mother often, and every time they would see her, they would maltreat her. They raped her as well. I saw it with my own eyes. Her and my husband's sister who was only 16. One Serbian soldier wanted to take her to Serbia with him. She went through a lot. They held us isolated until NATO removed them in June. My husband's grandmother visited us in March in that house and they raped me in front of her. After the war, I begged her to promise she would keep my secret. One day, when I slapped my son, she said "When your husband gets home, I'm going to tell him everything that happened to you". When I went to see my mother, she told my husband everything. When I returned, he confronted me and said "Why didn't you tell me what happened? I had to learn about this from someone else". He was very upset, but I told him everything I went through. After that, he has always protected me, he never mentioned it or made me feel bad.

After the war, I asked for help from an organization in D. I had learned about it from a woman who worked at the municipality and when I went there, another municipality official was waiting to talk to me. He heard my confession and instead of helping me, he offered to pay me in exchange for living with him. I never stepped foot in there again.

In 2006, a friend advised me to go to QPDG. I trusted them and they helped me a lot. I reported my case to the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and state prosecution. The UNMIK police brought me some black and white photos of Serbian soldiers to identify the perpetrators but I didn't recognize any of them. I didn't receive any other information from them.

UNICEF Photo | Roger LeMoyne

I am Mimoza (not real name), I am 48 years old, and I am a wife and mother of three children. I live in a village in the north of Kosovo. On 22 May 1999, in the early morning hours, Serbian forces entered my cousin's house where we were sheltered, in the north of Kosovo. They took us outside and told us to gather at the city cemetery. I was 27 years old at the time, and I was pregnant and was with my two daughters, who were 3 and 1 year old, my mother-in-law and my family. My husband took refuge in the mountains. There were many people, men, women and children in the cemetery. We were surrounded by Serbian forces, who separated men and women. After mistreating the men in front of us, they drove them in an unknown direction in army trucks, while women, children and the elderly remained. They all lined us up and told us to enter a nearby house one by one to get ID cards; it was a two-story house. While we were all tired and waiting in the row, I was holding my youngest daughter in my arms, close to my parents, sisters and mother-in-law. My brothers were taken from the Serbian police. Suddenly, a policeman in uniform approached me and grabbed me by the arm, pulled my daughter away from my arms and threw her on the ground. My mother-in-law who was nearby, begged him "take me, do not take her, she has young children", but he hit my mother-in-law with a rifle and left her bleeding on the ground. They called him XXX and together with another policeman, they sent me to the second floor of the house and raped me. When they were done, this XXX hit me in the back with his boots, so hard that I lost consciousness. From then on, I have had a damaged spine.

When I regained consciousness, they had left me in the corridor of the second floor, with torn clothes, almost naked; and in that condition, I returned to the family. My 18-year-old sister was also raped that day. That same evening, I asked for help from an Albanian doctor who had a private practice nearby. For five days in a row I received medical treatment, injections and infusions, and since I was pregnant the doctor adjusted the therapy because of the pregnancy. I told him I had been raped, even though he had already noticed it. Due to the injuries and the trauma, I had a miscarriage in the seventh month of my pregnancy and lost twin boys.

I was devastated. My husband and family always supported me. My mother-in-law is no longer alive, but she had been the source of my strength. She supported me immensely. The other relatives of my husband and from my side, are not aware of what happened to me, and I dare never speak openly about it because I would be stigmatized, judged, and would not be the only one to have consequences but also my husband and children, who are already adults, would face consequences. Since the post-war period, I have received psychiatric treatment from various public and private doctors, but, at first, I did not tell them what happened to me, I feared prejudice.

UN Photo | Antonin Kratochvil VII

In 2017 I shared my experience with the family doctor who referred me to the Kosovo Center for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims. There I started the psychological treatment, because it was the only place where I could talk about experiencing sexual violence, without feeling judged but always understood and supported.

Even today I continue to visit the organization, where I receive medical and psychological treatment. I did not know where I had to report my case, so in 2010 my husband and I headed to EULEX; we reported the case there. There were two international police officers and a translator. After giving the statement, I asked them to give me a copy of the testimony but they told me that that is not allowed.

From then until 2017 nothing was undertaken, and in 2017 I saw one of the rapists on television being extradited from Montenegro. I called the Kosovo police and I reported the case again. I am indignant that my testimony given at EULEX was never found by the Kosovo police. An indictment has already been filed against one of the perpetrators, and in January 2021 I testified in front of the court and in the presence of the perpetrator. Now we are waiting for the sentencing of the perpetrator. I did not have any financial costs when I reported the case; on the contrary I had the constant psychological support from KRCT throughout the trial process and they helped me with travel and food expenses and psychological sessions.

In 2018, with the support of KRCT, I was recognized as a victim of sexual violence by the government's commission for recognition and verification of status as a victim of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. Since then, I have received a monthly pension worth 230 euros. My psychological condition has now greatly improved thanks to the support of my family and KRCT. I would encourage all victims of sexual violence, wherever they are, to seek treatment and justice, and to not give up. I would also appeal to all families of victims of sexual violence to support them, because what has happened to us is horrible, and family support is essential to overcoming the trauma. I live every day with the hope that my abuser will be punished, and even if I only live for two more days after that, I will at least die in peace.

COVID-19 has had a very bad impact on me, especially in the first three months. The isolation triggered the war experience, and when we heard about people dying from COVID-19, it seemed like during the war when we were informed about the people who had been killed. Thanks to KRCT online services I overcame this situation, but COVID-19 has worsened our financial situation as well, because both my husband and son lost their jobs.

I am Shyhrete Tahiri Sulimani. I am 49 years old, and I now live in Calgary, in the province of Alberta, Canada. I am a survivor of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. Before the NATO bombings started, I had come from Bujanovc (a town located in the southern part of Serbia) to visit my parents, with my two young daughters, three and one years old. When the bombings began in March of 1999, together with my parents and uncles, we were forced to move from one house to another for security reasons and out of fear from members of the Serb forces. At one point during the escape, it was dark and I lost contact with my family and was left alone with my little girls. We settled in a house where no one lived. Late at night, for a moment I heard the door and a lot of noise; it was very dark because we had no lights. I did not dare to move, my heart was beating very fast with fear. I was shocked when five Serb paramilitaries entered the house; they held batteries in their hands and aimed them at our faces. They asked for my ID card, but I had nothing with me - during the escape I had lost my handbag where I had the documents. I told them that I am a guest in Kosovo and that I come from Bujanovc. They did not believe me and asked me the name of the mayor of this municipality. I did not know; if I had known I would probably be safe, but I did not remember. They laughed at me, talked nonsense, and I was terrified, I thought they would kill me and the girls. One of the paramilitaries told me: "We will not hurt the girls if you obey us in our demands", and then they forcibly stripped me and started raping me. My little daughter was crying, so they took them both to the next room. They talked, swore, hit me, and pulled my hair. It was torturous but I did not make a sound because I did not want the girls to be scared. I was mentally detached from there, I was focused only on the voices and cries of my girls, and I just wanted to know that they're alive. After they did what they pleased, they left me in a miserable state, and I immediately went to the other room, to my daughters, happy to see them alive. We stayed there until the morning. I turned my clothes from inside out, cleaned myself and put on the same clothes again.

The next morning, I left for Bujanovc, where my husband was. When I got there, I had traces of injuries on my body and face, but I did not tell him what had happened to me; I said I got hurt running away at night. After some time, together with the girls we took refuge in a Macedonian camp "Qegran". After three-four days there, I was feeling weaker and my emotions were mixed up. I did not know if I was happy that I survived the army soldiers or if it was better if I had died. Then, I told a UN worker that I needed to see a doctor! She was so nice and caring towards me! She took me to the doctor where I was treated for wounds, even though my wounds were more spiritual then physical or that is what I thought in that time. "Doctors without Borders" were helping the refugees in the camp. After my examination, the doctor suggested to take me to the Skopje hospital because there was limited equipment for gynecology. He asked me to bring my husband but I told the doctor that my husband did not know what happened to me. The nurses were right beside me, in every appointment I had. My experience with the staff and the doctor in the camp was really professional, friendly, helpful and caring. From Macedonia's camp, I was able to travel to Canada. Because my husband did not know what happened to me, I was not able to seek any emotional help right away in Canada. A year and a half after we arrived in Canada, my psychological condition was getting worse by the day, so I took the courage and told him. He left me immediately after and since then we have been divorced.

I was lucky to come to Canada, where, as we know, they have the best medical treatments, but that did not change the fact that I had to carry all the pain and suffering by myself. After 13 years, I had the most amazing person to trust and that is Dr. Feride Rushiti, the director of Kosovo Center for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims. I was so blessed to talk to her; without having to tell her, she knew what happened to me only by our conversations. Anytime I was feeling hopeless, I called her and she was there for me. I call her MOTHER TERESA 2. In 2019, accompanied by representatives of KRCT, I filed a criminal report with the Special Prosecution in Pristina, requesting that justice finally be served.

I finally made the decision to stand up and speak up. Today, I would love to talk to people if they would be willing to listen, not just hear. I would love to share my story with the world. Not only because that's my trauma and pain, but because that's our universal experience. This is happening everywhere, and all the time and people are still closing their eyes, ears, and minds. But we have the power to open minds, eyes, ears, and hearts. Sometimes hope is not obvious, sometimes you are struggling to find some light to believe that everything will be alright. But to overcome a fear, rape, cancer and still to be a loving mother, loving friend, and supporter of others who need and deserve to be supported, are miracles in themselves.

Hope is what helps us to believe in miracles. Hope is what allows miracles to come true. Living in Canada is much easier than in other countries but it doesn't mean I'm a different person. When you experience war rape, no matter where you live you carry pain with you.

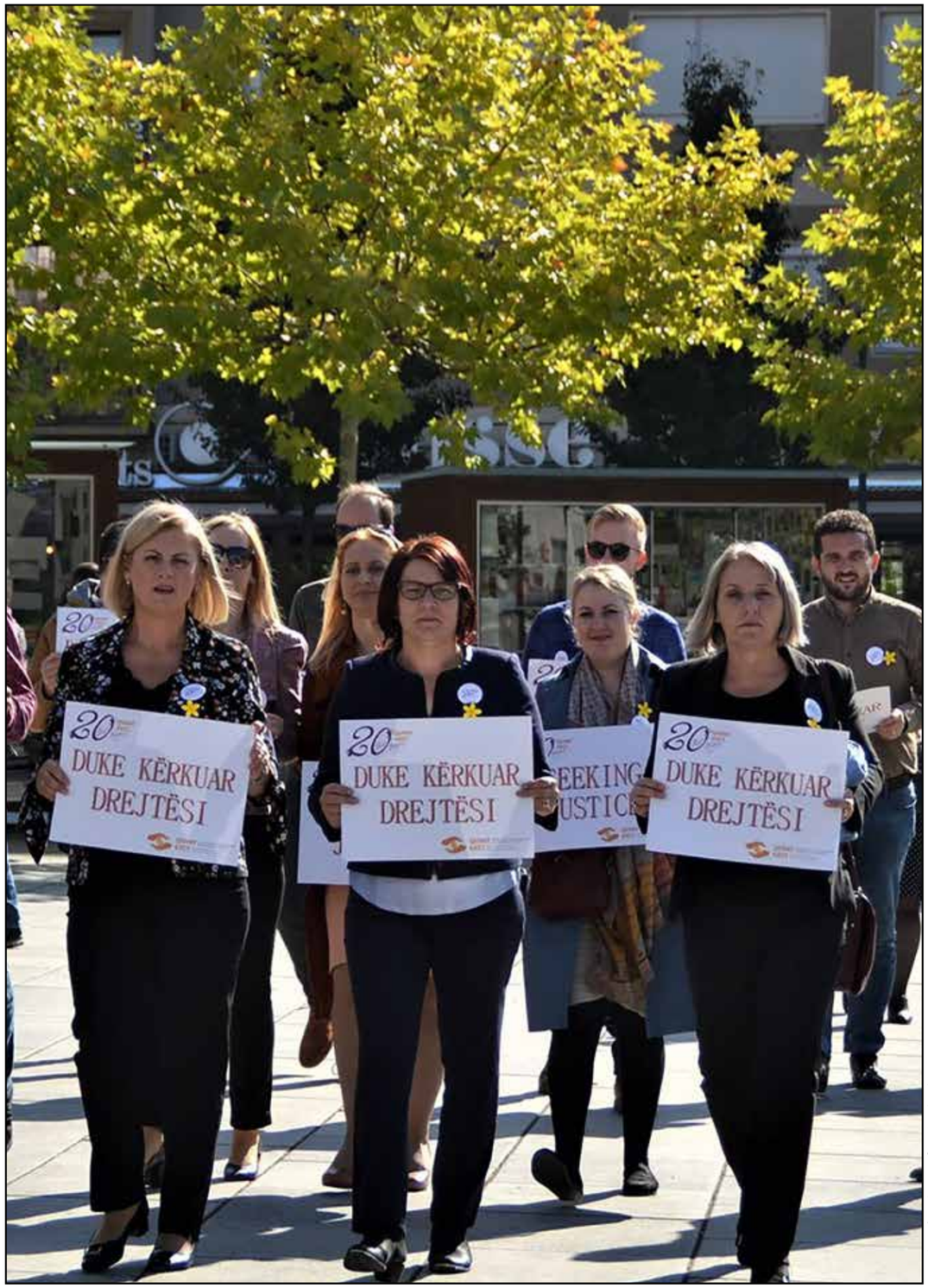


Photo | Embassy of Switzerland in Kosovo

I am Teuta (not real name), I am 31 years old, and I am from D. I was a victim of sexual violence in May 1999. During the war, I was only 9 years old. Until February 1999 my family lived in village T. When the situation worsened, we left our homes and went to D., at our cousin's. My stepmother and other relatives went in another direction and I was left with my grandmother, and my aunt and uncle in a house in D. My grandmother's sister lived nearby and brought us milk every day. One of our cousins had a little baby, so one day, together with my grandmother and her sister, we sent them some milk.

The road was very quiet that day; there was no one in the streets except for a group of four women walking in front of us. When we approached some houses, a group of seven-eight Serb soldiers came out. First, they grabbed those four women that were walking in front of us and started physically mistreating them. Then one of them grabbed me; I tried to run but he pulled me by my arm. My grandmother started running towards me and begging him to let me go because I was only a child. She was running after us, trying to save me from them but they aimed at her with their guns and told her: "You are old women, we don't need you. Stay outside!" Together with those other women, they put me in an abandoned house. They took those women to the second floor and put me in a separate room in the first floor. The room was empty. That soldier that grabbed me was very tall, his face was painted, he was wearing a pattern uniform and was armed. He started speaking in Serbian but I did not understand what he wanted from me. He took off his jacket and laid it on the ground. He put his knees on the jacket. In that moment, I thought he was going to cut me or kill me.

Never did I imagine that he would rape me because I was so young, and I didn't know what he was going to do to me or what the word 'rape' meant. I was more physically matured even though I was only 9 years old. He started pulling me closer to him, forcibly taking off my clothes. I screamed as much as I could, I tried to get away from him but I was not strong enough. When he undressed me, he laid me on the ground and started touching and biting my body. I was covered in bruises. Then he undressed himself and started raping me. I was in excruciating pain, I was bleeding and I did not have the strength to try and protect myself or scream anymore. Oh God it was awful! I don't think there is anything worse that could happen to someone. While he was raping me, I lost consciousness and I do not remember what happened to me afterwards. I was not able to endure what he was doing to me.

When I woke up, I was in my grandmother's lap at home. She started cleaning me. I could not stop my body from shivering with pain, I couldn't calm down for a moment. My grandmother told me that no one can know what I experienced because it is shameful and if someone asks what happened, I should tell them that I fell. Those days, some other people took refuge in our home. I was always more withdrawn. Every time the door opened I would jump in fear; at night I cried and couldn't sleep. I often had stomach aches and was never the same as other children. I couldn't believe how my life changed from that day forward... and that tears would be a part of every day and every night of my life; that I would never forget the trauma I experienced that day. My grandmother took care of me and tried to calm me down. If I didn't have her, I would lose my mind. Until the war ended, we stayed in that house.

After the war, we returned home and I never told anyone about what happened to me, not even my step-mother. I started elementary school, and then continued high school but I was always withdrawn from people. I didn't have friends because I thought that if I talked to someone, they would know what happened to me. In 2014, my father found me a boy who lived abroad and I got engaged. I tried to tell him about my traumatic experience, but I could never do it. Every time he approached me, I walked away from him because he reminded me of what I experienced. Eventually he noticed that something was bothering me and tried to understand what the reason was.

After a year, my step-mother found out about what happened to me and told my fiancé "How are you marrying a woman that was raped during the war?" and on that day he told me that we cannot be together and left me. I never reported what happened to me. I was too afraid that I would be identified or that someone would recognize the story and everyone would know. I only came forward and talked about it in KRCT and I was treated in the best way. I was always afraid that someone would find out, that is why I never socialized, I was distant from my friends, I always thought that I was different from other children; I was scared that every time I would talk, people would find out. I was always alone, even in my school years I never made friends. What happened to me had a big impact on my life. I still find it hard to trust people, or decide to live with someone. After what I have been through, I don't know if I can find peace or find someone that understands me.

The photos are not associated with the testimonies

UNICEF Photo | Babajanyan V

I am Vasfije Krasniqi Goodman, I am 39 years old. I now live in Texas, USA. I am a survivor of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. The incident occurred on April 14th, 1999. It was late afternoon, around 7 p.m. At the time, I was at home with my mother, when a policeman in a Serbian uniform appeared at the entrance of our house. He was looking for my father and brothers, but they were not home, so he asked for our IDs. After looking at my mother's ID, he handed her the document. When he saw mine, he said to my mother, "She has to come to the police station to give a statement about her father and brothers, because that's what Dejani asked for" (Dejani was the commander of the local police). My mother was very worried and she was begging him, saying: "Please do not take my daughter, she is a child, take me instead of her". "No," he replied, "she is a child and she doesn't know how to lie." My mother took me by the hand, brought me close to her body and did not let me go, but he grabbed me by the hair and pulled me out of the backyard and put me in his car. I was only 16 years old. He started driving and headed to Prishtina. He did not go to the police station as he told us, which was in the village of Preluzha; instead, he went to a Serbian village 'Babimovc'. There were Serbian youth playing ball. He stopped the car. The sun went down and it got dark. He lit his match on my face, and waved at those Serbs; they approached the window and watched as he said to them, "Vidi šta imam."(see what I have), I was extremely scared, shivering and crying constantly as they laughed at me. Then he sent me to a house that was still under construction, pulled a knife from his belt, put it against my throat, and began to strip my clothes, while the knife was held in my throat. There he started to sexually assault me as I cried, screamed, and begged him: "please kill me, do not do this", while he replied "this hurts more than killing, you will always remember this".

After he did what he pleased, he put me in the car and took me back to the Serbian village where we were before, stopped the car in front of a grocery store, where an elderly civilian approached us, pointing his gun at my head from behind. He got me out of the car and sent me to a house nearby. I kept crying and begging him: 'kill me, kill me', I did not want to live anymore, but he continued to rape me. Later both of them took me to my house and they threatened me to not talk about what happened, otherwise they would kill us all.

And when I came back home, I did not say a word, but I told them that I do not want to spend another minute there. Immediately after, we went to my sister's. The next day, our army found out that the police had taken me; they took me from my sister's and sent me to the base where they were staying. There, they gave me some medicine to calm me down and I told an Albanian commander everything that happened to me.

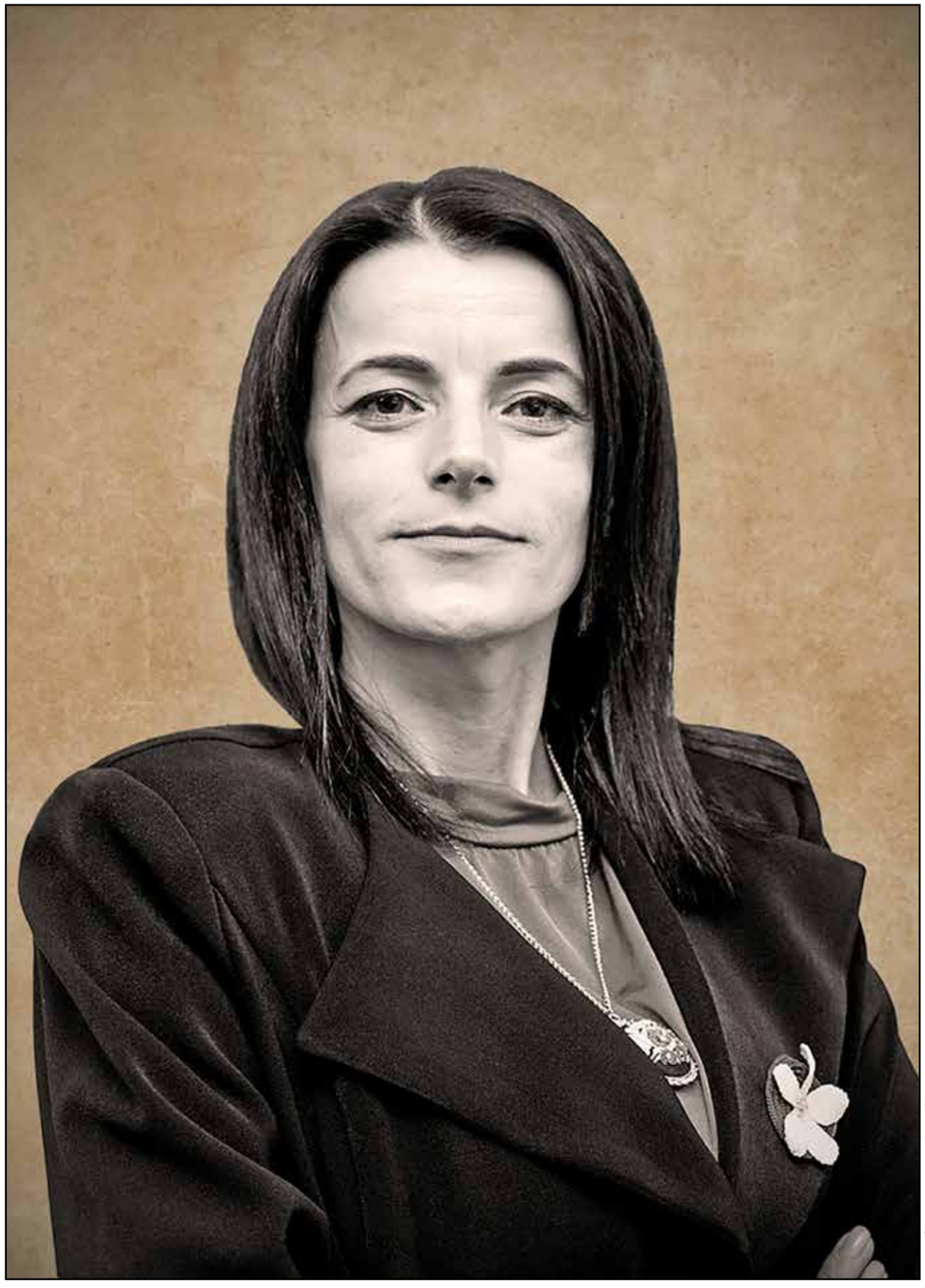
Immediately after the war ended, I told my brother the whole story; he was 19 years old and since then he has been my greatest supporter. After the liberation, I received medical treatment in a private clinic; I was not aware of the existence of NGOs. In 1999, I gave my statement to UNMIK. In 2001 I left Kosovo, I went to America and there I received psychosocial support. In 2010 I gave my testimony in EULEX; they did not find my statement given to UNMIK at that time and told me I had to start over. After I gave my testimony at EULEX, I was told that they had found the '99 statement. That was torturous. Any expenses about checkups, medical visits, travel and others had been covered by me. In 2010-2011, I also reported the case to the Kosovo Police.

In 2012, during a visit to Kosovo, I met with the Kosovo police; they presented me with some pictures, to see if I could identify the perpetrators based on the pictures. I recognized them, two pictures that looked like them. Based on the pictures, and based on the statement, two people were arrested. When the court session was held, I participated in the trial from America, through videoconference. I did not have a lawyer because I was told that I didn't need one. In the end, the perpetrators turned out to be innocent. I was very disappointed.

I was fortunate that my family has never seen me differently from my sisters. I can even say that as the youngest daughter, I grew up being pampered and cared about, and this has continued to this day. I have never felt lonely, neither stigmatized, nor isolated, even after I got married. In 2018, I was recognized as a victim of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo.

In the same year, with the support of the Kosovo Center for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, I spoke publicly about rape and called for justice for war crimes survivors in Kosovo and around the globe, becoming the first survivor who speaks openly about rape during the war in Kosovo. Today, I am in a completely different position, because since I shared my confession openly in Kosovo, my status has changed several times.

Now, among other things, I am a representative of the people in the Assembly of Kosovo, which I think is very important because I, in addition to being the voice of the survivors, will be committed to justice, which is healing or spiritual satisfaction for the survivors. I will insist on advocating for the prevention of sexual violence during wars and conflicts. I will demand those criminals be brought to justice, because they are the ones who should be tried / punished and not the survivors. My great hope and desire are that sexual violence/rape will never, ever be used as a war tool.



Vasfije Krasniqi Goodman | © Private

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY MEDICA KOSOVA

My name is Besa (pseudonym) and I am 49 years old. I am married and have three children: a son aged 28 and two daughters (26 and 24). I am a survivor of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo and I live in a small village in Gjakova municipality. The incident happened from 27th of March 1999 until 29th of March 1999. It was 5 a.m. when large numbers of Serbian police and paramilitaries entered our village and started to expel us from our homes. There were around 9 houses in our neighborhood at that time. I was living with my 52 years-old father-in-law, my sister-in-law and my brother-in-law aged 20 and 16. My mother-in-law died two years earlier after suffering from cancer. Before taking us out, they ordered us to give them all the money and gold we have if we want to remain alive otherwise, they would kill us all; including my children who were 6, 4 and 2 years old at that time. We gave them around 500 Marks and all the jewelry we had, which was estimated at over 5,000 Deutsche Marks; a collection I received as presents when I got married.

After taking us into the street, they burned the house completely. There were people from the village in the street, around 60. Some were with cars and most on tractors with women and children while trying to flee to Albania. They lined up everyone after making them step out of the cars and tractors; they had their machine guns pointed at us. We thought they will kill us and therefore everyone was crying, shaking and covering their children. Smoke, flame and terror was felt all over the place. After staying like that for over 5 minutes that seemed for 5 hours to us, they ordered everyone to leave to Albania. We arrived in a village near Gjakova where a number of paramilitaries and police were waiting for us. It was more than obvious that they were communicating via walkie-talkie and organizing the terror we suffered after reaching an abandoned farming house in this village.

We were around 60 women, men and children when they stopped us near this farm. They separated the men – around 23 – from women and children by placing them in the barn, while women and children were taken inside the house. We were all detained in the house for three days and each of us was systematically raped and tortured by cigarettes, knives and rifles whenever we tried to resist. We were around 17 women, seven little children and three girls aged 14-15; while there were two police officers and five paramilitaries selecting seven-nine women every evening and taking them upstairs. It was devastating watching these girls get dragged upstairs and being raped during the first night we arrived there. All of them were covered in blood when they joined us in the room downstairs. Apart from rape, they started beating us, making scars with cigarettes and knives on our chest and other parts of the body. My children were crying each time they grabbed me by my hair and took me upstairs; especially the youngest one who was kept by an older woman until I was back. Every evening, they pulled the men from the barns, made them sit in front of the house so they could hear the screams of the women and girls. Until the last night when they killed them all: including my father-in-law who results missing since then together with all the other men detained in the barn during those days. While I could not recognize any of paramilitaries who raped me the first night, the second night I was dragged upstairs by a local Serb dressed in police uniform who used to work as an inspector in Gjakova municipality. I knew him very well by name and surname. The last night of our detention, they pushed me and other women down the stairs after conducting sexual assault, torture and rape. All of us were hurt and we could hardly stand up due to many injuries and terrible weakness we felt because of the 72 hours of terror and nightmare we suffered.

On 29th of March, at midday they gathered everyone in the field next to the farm we were detained. They had machine guns pointed at us and we were all waiting when they start killing us. while I was not afraid of dying myself, I was holding my children tight with hopes that a miracle would happen and save them. So many times I wished I could die and leave everything behind. But it was my children who kept me alive. Suddenly, one of them asked the others not to shoot after speaking on the walkie-talkie, probably with their superiors. We were just told to continue our journey to Albania; which we did. I was placed with a very good family in Durres, Albania. An older woman with her daughter took care of my children all the time since I was not capable of doing so. I was crying all the time, shaking, fainting frequently and refused to eat or drink for a couple of days.

However, seven weeks later my host took me to a medical center after arranging an appointment and convincing me to visit a female gynecologist since I was complaining all the time from pains in my belly. Although I did not tell her about my experience, she could assume that from my health and emotional situation. The gynecologist told me that I was two-months pregnant and she congratulated me for having a fourth baby coming. I just stared at her and fainted. The doctor realized that I was raped when I told her that I have not seen my husband for five months and therefore I begged her to conduct an abortion, which she did. My husband heard what happened in our village from some elderly women, but he remained silent until we came back to Kosovo on 17th of June when he asked me not to be afraid and ashamed from what I went through because he is there and would I continue to support me forever. He has indeed been my greatest supporter ever since.

UN Photo | Antonin Kratochvil / VII

However, my anxiety and trauma did not go away until I started to receive counselling in Medica Kosova. In June 2002, a Counselor came to visit me in my house and asked me to come to the organization for counselling. I was part of every counselling session until 2014, while I continued to attend training and other social activities that took place in the organization after I had concluded with counselling. Besides, I received bees with bee-keeping supplies, a tractor, hens and other milking facilities from the organization during the last 10 years.

Now I have a very large farm with cows, geese, goats and a garden with all kinds of fruits and vegetables. I take care of the animals and farming activities with love and devotion. Now, I have completely recovered and I go to Medica Kosova when I refer other survivors like me to receive professional support. Since 2014, I have referred more than 30 survivors to receive counselling and assistance in completing applications for their status recognition, always by giving them my own example of empowerment, and improved livelihood with my work and additional incomes I receive after having my status approved by the state.

The only thing that continues to disturb me is that justice is still missing for me and so many other women who survived the same, despite recognizing one of the perpetrators by name and surname. In 2012, the organization supported me to document sexual violence at EULEX War Crimes Unit until 2014. Moreover, they enabled me to meet EULEX Investigator in the premises of the organization where I was giving my testimony and bringing declarations of additional eyewitnesses. I refused to enter EULEX building at that time, therefore this was the best solution. According to their female Investigator coming from Finland, an arrest order was issued by EULEX against the perpetrator; however, there was no arrest and no trial happening. The criminal continues to remain free because of whatever reasons that should not come above justice, while we continue to wait and see that those who committed sexual violence, torture and other crimes are placed behind the bars. I only hope that I can wait that long.

My name is Mone (pseudonym). I am 53 and I live with my 24-year-old son in a small village near Decani municipality in Kosovo. My 28-year-old daughter is married and lives with her family in another village near Peja municipality. My son suffers from epilepsy that occurred because of sleeping on the concrete floor during the week when I was detained in a house with more than 30 other women and girls nearby my village. I was 32, my daughter was 5 and my son was two years old when my husband left me with his parents and two sisters in early March 1999 when he joined the Kosovo Liberation Army. Apart from them, four other women from our neighborhood came to live with us since they were also alone with their children and there was a miss-perception that we might be safer if we stay together.

It was in Bajram at the end of March 1999, when my sisters-in-law and I woke up early and went to the basement to prepare breakfast for everyone, when we heard shots and terrible noise from outside. I heard my mother-in-law saying that many Serbian paramilitaries were surrounding the house. Some of them were masked and some had painted faces so that we could see only their eyes. While trying to go upstairs where my children were sleeping, a man grabbed my hair and dragged me down in the yard where I was lined with other women and children, while the men were lined up separately. My sisters-in-law and the other four women who were staying in our house were also taken there. They took the men into other direction, while the women and children were taken into an empty house a few blocks away. Since then, these 20 men from our village are still missing.

Other women also coming from nearby villages were gathered in this house. There were around 25 of them. I don't know exactly how many paramilitaries were staying in this house since we were kept in the basement and they were staying on the first floor. According to the amount of food we had to prepare, there were around eight to 10 of them. The number was changing every day; sometimes they were five sometimes more. For five days, we were raped and abused in the most brutal way. Each day I suffered rape and torture from two different perpetrators. Whenever we tried to resist they would put out the cigarette on my body and make a scar with a knife. I stopped resisting, not because of being afraid from death; but because they threatening us with the lives of our little children. Every one of us wished to have died that day. I was also forced to prepare food and serve alcohol every single evening with five other women since we were told to be better cooks compared to the others.

This terror and nightmare went on for five days until the criminals went away and I went to an improvised hospital by the Kosovo Liberation Army in the mountains of another village and took the necessary medical aid for more than eight days. There I found out that my husband was killed a few days before when he tried to approach the village after hearing that it was surrounded by military and paramilitary forces. After receiving medical assistance, I went to Gjakova where I stayed until the war was over in June 1999.

Coming back to my village was not easy at all with the trauma I had and a son who was diagnosed with meningitis which later resulted in his epilepsy. The doctors told me that it was caused from sleeping on the cold floor for five nights after I told them that we stayed in the basement when Serbian forces surrounded the village. I did not tell anybody what happened these five days of my detention. I met some of the survivors a few weeks after we came back to the village and they were also in a very desperate and difficult psychological situation. Whenever I met them, the first thing they asked me was not to talk about the incident. In a way, we had to swear to one another that nobody else would find out about our traumatic experience.

This is why for nearly 18 years I had never spoken about this. Only my mother knew, as she could realize what had happened to me from my symptoms and anxiety that I had every single night. However, silence made it so recovery could not take place until mid-2017 when I went to the organization Medica Kosova and started to receive professional support. I felt so relieved after telling about my experience to a female psychologist in the organization. I cried a lot while telling my story while she was telling me that it is a normal reaction and that crying also helps. Indeed, I could hardly cry during the day since I had to take care of my son and try to cover up my emotions. Since then, I went for counselling twice a month and achieved to strengthen my resources and be able to cope easier with the symptoms.

I have lived alone with my son since 2017 when I moved to the city of Decan in my own apartment, after receiving money from my brother who lives and works in Switzerland. It was not possible for me to live with my mother-in-law anymore. She was annoying me all the time after she found out from her daughters that I was raped, despite that also her daughters went through the same experience. This situation became worse after her daughters married. However, as a widowed survivor of sexual violence the "shame" was stronger, and I had to isolate. I was not even allowed to go to my daughter's school or to go and visit other relatives apart from my mother.

Photo | Tiffany Ommundsen

Now I feel much better and dedicate my time more to the sewing shop I opened together with my mother who used to sew traditional clothing since before the war. Additional machinery and material we received from Medica Kosova during 2018 when they secured them through a project. It is the situation with my son that continues to concern me. I have to be with him every single night because of seizures he often has and the medicine I have to give him.

I recruited a woman to take care of him during the day so I can work in the shop. This was possible after receiving my monthly pension in the amount of 230 EUR when I was supported by the organization to complete and submit applications for my status recognition. I never tried to access justice as long as I could not recognize the perpetrators. Apart from been masked with painting, I tried to avoid looking them in their faces. Somehow, they tried to protect themselves from being identified and knew that they would not be punished.

I wish I could document this incident and bring them to justice for what they did to me and the consequences for my son. He does not have a normal life and with a traumatized mother by his side, he could not really enjoy his childhood.

I am Sofija (pseudonym). I am 49 and I live in a village in the Decani region. I'm a survivor of sexual violence. In May 1998 I was raped by the Serbian police on the way to the village of Koshare somewhere in a mountainous area, on the road that connects the village of Batushë with the village of Koshare, near the border with Albania.

At the time I was raped I was five months pregnant with my second child. My husband and father-in-law had decided to send me to my family in the village of Koshare after the first military offensive in my village in the region of the municipality of Decan. I had my three years-old son with me at the time. On the mountain road we heard the car sounds and my father-in-law told my husband to hide in the mountains, while my father-in-law, and my son and I continued our way. A Serbian police jeep stopped us with four people in police uniforms inside. They asked for our IDs but I did not have mine with me. They asked my father-in-law where he was sending me because they suspected that I was from Albania. He told them that I was his daughter-in-law, while they were checking to see if he had a gun in the bags we were holding. When they grabbed me by the arm, my father-in-law shouted. They told him to leave if he doesn't want to see us killed. He ran away and left me alone with my son. When they dragged me on the ground I saw one of the policemen with a mustache undressing. Then I knew what was going to happen. He stripped me naked and started raping me. Since I was pregnant, I felt a lot of pain. I lost consciousness and when I woke up I heard my son crying and calling me "Mom, mom". I did not see anyone there. Neither my father-in-law nor the policemen. I got up, got dressed and slowly took my son into my arms and continued walking on the mountain road. I felt so much pain that I thought maybe the time to give birth had come.

When I got some 50 meters near the house my mother saw me and approached me. She asked me what happened to me. I didn't know what to say to her, and I don't even remember clearly what my answer was because I was afraid and terrified that the Serbs would come in front of me again. All I know is that I told my mother that I was having a terrible pain in my stomach and that I wanted to lie down immediately. For several days I did not eat or sleep.

In September I gave birth to my son in the hospital of Gjakova. After five weeks, he left this world. I couldn't breastfeed, and my mother was trying to give him humanitarian aid milk. One morning when I woke up, I realized that he had died. The whole time I stayed with my mother, neither my husband or someone from his family came to look for me. In March, after the NATO bombing started, my family and I left for Albania. During my stay in Albania, I was told that my husband's family is in the city of Shkodra, while my husband had remained in Kosovo hiding in the mountains. My brother and I drove to Shkodra one day to look for my husband's family. I found them, but my mother-in-law did not accept me. She told me "Go back where you came from, you no longer have a place in our family". "You were raped by Serbs and your son died, so you have nothing to do with our family anymore" – were her words that destroyed me. Even though I told her that I wanted to stay with them, my mother-in-law did not let me. Reluctantly I returned to Tirana to my family.

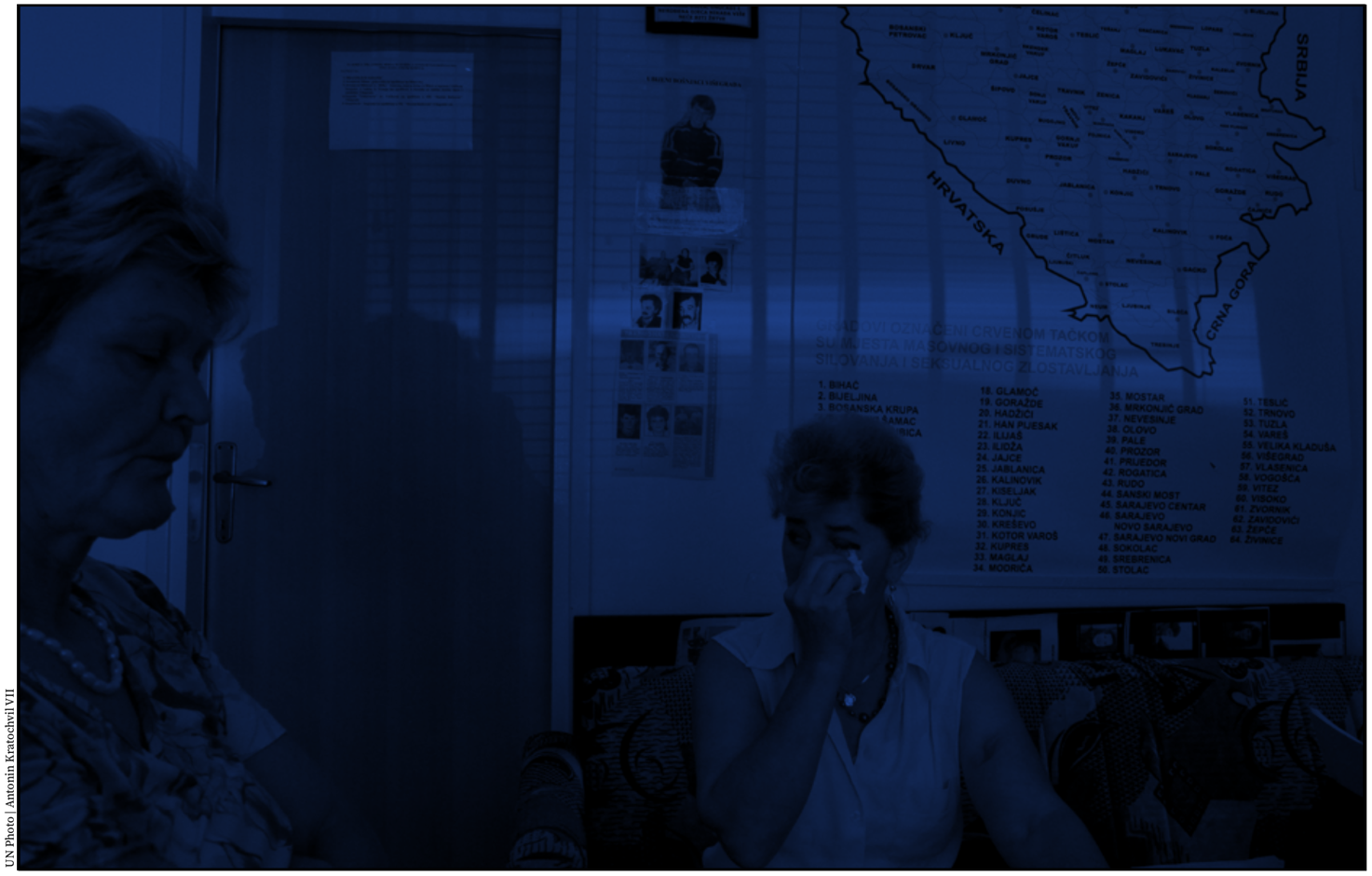
In July 1999, we returned to Kosovo. I wanted to go back to my husband and see him. When I went to my husband's village, the husband's family had returned there but they were staying in tents because their houses had been burned during the war. My mother-in-law did not go out to meet me, whereas my brother-in-law and sister-in-law told me to come back tomorrow until they found a tent for me. The next day I met my husband but he was very cold to me. He told me that he knows what the Serbian police did to me; however, for the sake of our son, he would not leave me. "But you are no longer my wife" were his words. Since then, our relationship has changed a lot. My husband mostly stays out, drinks a lot of alcohol, spends money, does not speak to me at all or when he speaks to me, he speaks all his words with contempt. He rarely makes love with me, only when he is drunk. That's how we conceived our other son after the war. My mother-in-law has never treated me well while my father-in-law has never mentioned my experience of rape to me. I isolated myself because it seemed to me that whoever looked me in the eyes knew what had happened to me.

Two years ago, a relative of mine who knew about my rape experience told me about Medica Kosova, the psychological services they provide, and my rights to apply for status recognition as a survivor of sexual violence during the war. Since February 2019, I have received psycho-social support at Medica Kosova and through their assistance I have applied for recognition of the status of a survivor of sexual violence. Psychological support and participation in self-help groups of women survivors of sexual violence in Medica Kosova have changed my life. I do handicrafts and I have sent some of the works to the corner of courage in the Presidency of Kosovo. For the first time after the war, I felt valued and I started to believe in myself.

This has been a big step for me. Now after 22 years I have realized that I am not guilty of what happened to me even though my husband and mother-in-law have always made me believe that I am responsible for it. Every day I started to think how much strength I had to have to survive to this day, alone, without support and stigmatized by family. It makes me believe I am a strong woman and I deserve to be respected.

Due to the pandemic, Medica Kosova has reduced the number of our meetings. The period of lockdown, to me it was quite like the period of the war when we remained isolated. However, we had the opportunity to consult online with the psychologist of the organization, which helped us to manage the symptoms of trauma triggered by the pandemic situation.

UN Photo | Milton Grant



UN Photo | Antonin Kratochvil VII

what they want since she could not understand a word. After each of their questions, she kept asking until one of paramilitaries asked her to stop and sent her to another room. At that time, I had a two-year old daughter and was two months pregnant with my son. After looking at each other, one of the policemen said: "let's make use of her since she speaks Bosnian". They told me that I should go with them and assist with translation for a group of Albanian women that they were detaining in one of the abounded houses a few blocks away from my home and asked me to leave my daughter with my mother-in-law.

I tried to resist by saying that I could not leave my daughter since I was still breast-feeding her. They grabbed me and said that they would bring me back home after I accomplish my duty otherwise I may not see my daughter again. We walked for less than 5 minutes when we reached an empty house and there were no other people there. They immediately started to rape me one after another until I lost consciousness and each time they would wake me up with water. I felt pain in my stomach and I still wondered how I could save my pregnancy despite the terror I suffered during that time. However, I tried not to make them realize that I was pregnant due to the fear that they would hit me harder until I had a miscarriage.

After this first day, two of the police officers went away and paramilitaries remained. They kept me locked in this house for three days and raped me every evening after they came back, usually at 19h each day. During this period, one of them was always there to watch me and prevent me from escaping. I was begging them to let me go and check on my daughter but they would slap me until I fell on the floor each time I was asking them to let me go. They asked me to cook and clean for them every day. However, the third day I was so weak that I couldn't move from the bed. The fourth day in the morning, they came to the room where I was kept and told me that I could go home. "Don't you dare to tell anyone what happened to you during these days, otherwise we shall come back and kill you and your daughter". "Anyway, we know where you live".

I do not know how I ran back to my house since I was very weak and could hardly stand on my feet. My mother-in-law was feeding my daughter and she realized what happened to me as soon as she saw my bruised face and torn dress. She did not ask anything but just handed my daughter to me and went inside. I felt disappointed by her not asking me if I was feeling well or telling me that she is happy to see me alive.

My name is Vezire (pseudonym), I am 44 and I originally come from Bosnia. I am a survivor of sexual violence during the war in Bosnia and Kosovo. I have three children; two daughters aged 24 and 7 and a 22-year-old son. My mother and I were raped in our apartment in Sarajevo by Serbian forces in July 1994. I was only 17 at that time and I was bleeding when my mom died from rape and torture few hours later. I was taken care of by an old neighbor for three months when my brother and sister picked me up and came together to stay with our close relatives in a village near Istog - Kosovo, until the war ended in Bosnia. While my family got back to Bosnia by mid of December 1995, I stayed in Kosovo after meeting a nice Albanian man whom I married a year later.

In March 1999 when the NATO bombing started, my son was two years old and my husband joined the Kosovo Liberation Army after leaving me alone with his parents. I was afraid that I might experience rape again, however I could not move from my home due to our village being surrounded from many Serbian forces. The incident occurred on April 18th, 1999.I was alone with my mother-in-law that day since my father-in-law was at the city market. It was around 14h when two Serbian police officers and two paramilitaries entered our home and asked for my ID after addressing them in Bosnian language. Both police officers had caps covering their faces while I could hardly see their eyes and could see only their beards. Paramilitaries had their faces painted in red and blue so they could hardly be recognized. I started to shake and fear so much that I would not remember their faces even if they were totally uncovered. They looked at me with anger when they realized that I was a Bosnian married to an Albanian man. They asked me about my husband and why he was not at home. I responded that he is not in Kosovo at all since he went to Germany to work six months ago. One of paramilitaries commented that only "bitches" could marry "terrorists". My mother-in-law came up from the basement of our house where she was preparing lunch and my daughter was asleep at that time. She took my hand and asked me

I went to Montenegro by mid-May 1999 and continued from there to my sister in Sarajevo, Bosnia, where I stayed for six months under neuropsychiatric treatment due to being in a deep depression after I tried to kill myself with a disinfectant. My sister took care of me all the time and asked my husband to leave me with her until I felt better and could travel back to Kosovo. However, neither of us mentioned what was the reason for my health situation.

After six months in therapy in Sarajevo, I could pull myself together and go back to my home in Kosovo where I told my husband everything the first night that I met him. Despite the shock, he tried to comfort me and has been supportive ever since. However, living with my parents-in-law was not easy at all. Our relationships were broken after they realized that I am a survivor of sexual violence. My mother-in-law would ask me to stay home and not expose myself each time I wanted to go to the market or shopping. She was "worried" about her family reputation if our neighbors or someone from community realized that I was raped during the war. I got more and more isolated and lost faith in myself and everyone else. My husband would always react to her comments and behavior but still psychological pressure continued until we were provided a social housing by municipality in Gjakova after receiving counselling and legal support in Medica Kosova to prepare the request and advocate on my behalf during 2018.

I went there to receive support in applying for my status recognition and pension, but this support went beyond that. I found my lost family there and my beloved sister who continues to live in Bosnia. Above all, I learned on how to respect myself.

I continue going there twice a month for group and individual counselling and they helped me a lot. I do really enjoy talking to other women in the group who have experienced the same thing I did but still have the courage and motivation to go on and look into the future.

MALI

UN Photo / Marco Dormino

MALI

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY THE UNITED NATIONS MULTIDIMENSIONAL INTEGRATED STABILIZATION MISSION IN MALI (MINUSMA), OFFICE OF THE SENIOR WOMEN PROTECTION ADVISOR

TÉMOIGNAGE ANONYME

UN Photo | Marco Dormino

Je viens de la région de Tombouctou. J'y vivais avec mon mari jusqu'en 2012 quand les djihadistes ont occupé le nord. Ils sont venus chez nous pour nous chercher et mon mari a fui. Depuis ce jour, je n'ai pas eu de ses nouvelles, je suppose qu'il a été tué mais je n'ai jamais vu son cadavre. Quand j'ai vu que la situation s'aggravait j'ai décidé de prendre mes enfants et de partir à Bamako par car. En cours de route, les djihadistes nous ont attrapé. Ils ont fait descendre les femmes, ont choisi celles qu'ils voulaient et laissé les autres. Ils m'ont choisie et ils ont jeté par terre mon enfant de six mois que je portais avec moi. Je les ai suppliés de laisser l'enfant avec moi, mais ils ont refusé. Ils m'ont amené dans la brousse, puis ils m'ont donné à un homme, qui était surement leur chef. Cet homme m'a violée, pendant plusieurs jours, entre 15 et 17 jours. Il y avait des femmes qui passaient une ou deux nuits et repartaient, d'autres qui restaient dix jours ou deux semaines avant d'être libérées.

Une fois qu'ils en ont eu fini avec moi, ils m'ont mise dans une voiture et m'ont déposée pour que je puisse regagner un petit village, où j'ai appris qu'une dame qui se trouvait dans le car avait récupéré mon enfant et l'avait amené avec elle jusqu'à Bamako. Je suis venue jusqu'à Bamako où j'ai été accueillie pendant quelques mois chez un parent avant de me chercher une maison dans un quartier moins cher.

Des ONG qui aident les déplacés comme 'Acted' ou 'World Vision' m'ont prise en charge à mon arrivée, on m'a donné du riz, de l'huile et de l'argent pour nourrir ma famille. Une fois à Bamako, j'ai appris que j'étais tombée enceinte pendant les jours où j'étais avec les djihadistes. Lors de mon accouchement, un homme qui avait entendu mon histoire m'a proposé de garder mon enfant né du viol et j'ai accepté car je ne pouvais pas le garder avec moi. Cet homme a donné mon contact à 'WILDAF' qui m'accompagne depuis. Depuis ce qui m'est arrivée, je ne dors plus. Chaque nuit, je suis réveillée par les coups de fusils et les pickups des djihadistes, et on dirait que mon cœur va s'arrêter, les cardiologues ont tout essayé mais jusqu'à présent ça ne va toujours pas.

TÉMOIGNAGE ANONYME

Mon violeur était un ami intime de mon mari. Il mangeait, dormait chez moi, je lavais ses vêtements. Un jour, il est venu nous voir à bord d'un nouveau véhicule et a demandé à mon mari de travailler pour lui. Mon mari a refusé car il y avait des rumeurs qui disaient qu'il avait rejoint un groupe rebelle. Quelques jours plus tard, il est venu le chercher de force et l'a gardé avec lui pendant plus d'un mois. Pendant ce temps, j'ai quitté mon foyer conjugal et suis rentrée chez ma famille, avec ma mère et ma sœur. Un jour il est venu m'y retrouver en m'offrant un téléphone portable de dernière génération et m'a demandé en échange d'enfiler un pantalon et de me faire belle pour partir avec lui. J'ai refusé, il m'a dit qu'il voulait m'épouser. J'ai refusé à nouveau, en lui disant que j'étais mariée à son ami et mère de plusieurs enfants. Il m'a répondu qu'il allait maltraiter mon mari qui était avec lui.

Après un mois, mon violeur est venu avec quatre gardes frapper mon frère et mes sœurs. Il m'a attrapée et il m'a jetée violemment dans son véhicule. Je suis restée six mois avec eux, sans souvenirs, sans pouvoir retrouver mes esprits. Quand il en a fini avec moi, il m'a traînée et m'a jetée au bord de la route vers 1 ou 2h du matin. Des passants qui m'ont retrouvée sont allés prévenir mes parents qui sont venus me récupérer.

J'étais telle une morte vivante, je n'arrivais pas à retrouver mes esprits. Puisqu'il n'y avait pas de médecins dans cette zone, ma mère m'a préparé des médicaments traditionnels pour soulager mes douleurs. Mon état ne s'arrangeait pas, alors j'ai dû aller à Mopti, où j'ai été transférée à Bamako pour me faire soigner. Petit à petit j'ai retrouvé mes esprits. Actuellement, je suis à Bamako avec mes enfants et mon mari qui m'a rejoint. J'ai accouché d'un enfant issu des viols. Mon mariage est devenu un enfer car mon mari ne supporte pas ce qui m'est arrivé, il dit que je le dégoute désormais. Il me rappelle souvent des souvenirs douloureux alors que je ne veux pas y penser. Ils nous ont tout pris au Nord, j'ai besoin d'aide pour la prise en charge de mes enfants car je ne peux plus travailler à cause de mes douleurs et mon mari ne subvient plus aux besoins de la famille. Je n'ai pas les moyens de mettre tous mes enfants à l'école ou de leur offrir de bonnes conditions de vie.

Je suis morte et revenue à la vie, je n'ai pas pardonné et je ne veux pas pardonner, maintenant tout ce que je veux c'est que justice soit faite.

UN Photo | Marco Dormino

Photo | APDF

Mme Diawara Bintou Coulibaly, Présidente de APDF Association pour le Progrès et la Défense des Droits des Femmes

Je suis Mme Diawara Bintou Coulibaly, je suis la présidente de l'Association pour le Progrès et la Défense des Droits des Femmes (APDF). Les survivantes que nous recevons sont référencées par les cellules régionales de l'APDF. Certaines survivantes partagent le contact de l'APDF avec d'autres femmes qui en ont besoin. Tout Bamako a mon numéro, grâce au « bouche à oreille » et aux émissions de radio. Par exemple, dans la région de Mopti, une femme avait été violée à plusieurs reprises par un groupe de dix hommes armés avant d'être confiée à l'un d'entre eux et est tombée enceinte. Lorsqu'une connaissance de cette femme a appris ce qui lui ait arrivée, elle a appelé l'antenne de Mopti. Il se trouve que j'étais à ce moment en mission alors je l'ai récupérée et l'ai amenée à Bamako, où elle a pu accoucher deux jours après son arrivée. Elle est restée avec son enfant au centre d'hébergement pendant plus de deux ans, avant de décider de retourner au sein de sa famille. Les personnes hébergées peuvent rester jusqu'à la résolution de leur problème: certaines restent jusqu'à trois ou quatre ans avec nous. Nous avons 40 lits, c'est actuellement assez pour héberger toutes les femmes qui demandent à être reçues en ce moment. Pendant la crise en 2012 et 2013, il est arrivé que nous manquions de place parce que beaucoup de survivantes du Nord étaient venues à Bamako.

En plus de la mise à l'abri, le principal besoin des femmes qui viennent nous voir est l'accès à un avocat. Lorsqu'elles font appel à nous, elles ont déjà épuisé toutes les voies au niveau de la communauté, nous sommes leur dernier recours. Nous n'avons actuellement qu'un gardien à la porte, nous demandons à l'Etat de nous fournir un agent de sécurité en vain depuis plusieurs années, mais n'avons pas reçu de réponse à ce jour. On mène ce travail à nos risques et périls depuis un moment, et on est toujours là.

UN Photo | Marco Dormino

Je m'appelle Safietou, j'ai 19 ans, j'habite à la commune urbaine de Gao. Le 17/10/2020, vers 19h-20h, j'étais avec mes copines dans la rue, quand brusquement deux hommes armés sur une moto nous ont pourchassées. Les autres ont pu s'échapper mais, comme moi je suis handicapée physique (malformation du pied droit), ils m'ont attrapée et m'ont amenée derrière les cimetières du château. C'est là que l'un a mis son arme sur ma tête pendant que l'autre me violait et tour à tour tous les deux ont abusé de moi. Ils m'ont dit que si je criais au secours ils allaient me tuer. C'était des Forces Armées Maliennes (FAMAs), ils étaient en tenue militaire. Un jour j'ai vu le premier qui m'a violée au camp 2 des FAMAs où je suis allé acheter de la glace.

Deux mois après le viol ma maman a constaté que j'étais enceinte. Elle m'a dit qu'elle allait me tuer si je ne montrais pas le responsable de la grossesse. C'est là que j'ai dit que c'était deux militaires qui m'avaient violée. Ma mère m'a amené au CSCOM (Centre de Sante Communautaire) du quartier et là-bas, vu que ma mère n'a pas les moyens pour payer mon ordonnance, la sage-femme a dit d'aller signaler le cas au One Stop Center du Fonds des Nations Unies pour la Population (FNUAP). Nous avons suivi les orientations de la sage-femme.

Arrivée au One Stop Center j'ai eu accès à tous les services de prise en charge gratuitement, le seul service que j'ai refusé c'est la justice. Je voulais porter plainte mais mon entourage m'a découragé. Mon père m'a chassé de la maison, et maintenant je vis chez les parents de ma meilleure amie. La mère de mon amie continue de m'amener au One Stop Center du FNUAP pour mes suivis. En matière de prévention des violences sexuelles liées au conflit, je pense que le gouverneur doit instaurer des patrouilles (jour et nuit) et des couvre-feux pendant la nuit et aussi mettre des ampoules pour éclairer les alentours des cimetières (si les alentours des cimetières étaient éclairés j'aurais pu avoir de l'aide). La pandémie de COVID-19 n'a pas eu de conséquences négatives sur l'accès aux services. Toutefois, avant la COVID-19, ma mère faisait du commerce entre Niamey et Gao, moi je l'aidais à vendre ses articles et elle me payait. Maintenant je n'ai rien, ma mère non plus, parce que la frontière est fermée.

“...IL A POINTÉ SON ARME SUR MOI, IL M’A DEMANDÉ DE RESTER COUCHÉE ET IL M’A VIOLÉE...”

UN Photo | Marco Dormino

Les photos ne sont pas associées à des témoignages.

Je m’appelle Agaichatou (pseudonyme), j’ai 21 ans, je suis de Monzonga. Le 02/02/2021, vers 1h du matin je dormais dans ma case, quand le petit frère de mon mari et son ami m’ont réveillé. Il a pointé son arme sur moi, il m’a demandé de rester couchée et il m’a violée. Après il a demandé à son ami de me violer aussi, c’est là que j’ai pris la fuite toute nue. Quand j’ai pris la fuite il a tiré sur moi. La balle a traversé mon bras gauche. Il est membre du groupe armé Ganda Izo.

J’ai pu signaler l’incident au point focal du comité d’alerte du FNUAP qui est dans mon village. Il fait à chaque fois des sensibilisations et il nous a dit que le FNUAP a un centre de prise en charge des violences sexuelles et basées sur le genre. J’ai couru plus de 2 km toute nue pour me rendre chez lui à 2h du matin, c’est là-bas que sa femme m’a donné un pagne. J’ai été traitée avec beaucoup de respect et de dignité, parce que je ne suis pas la seule à être violée par les hommes armés dans mon village. Par contre, je suis la seule qui a eu le courage d’aller chercher de l’aide. Le seul soutien que j’ai eu c’est celui de ma maman et de mes amis.

Le point focal du comité d’alerte du FNUAP a traité mon cas avec beaucoup de confidentialité. Si tout le village était au courant, moi et ma maman on aurait été obligées de quitter le village parce qu’on n’aurait pas pu supporter les critiques et les insultes de la communauté. Le matin à 5h il a appelé la femme qui travaille au FNUAP pour envoyer un véhicule me chercher qui est arrivé à 7h. J’ai été conduite au One Stop Center et j’ai eu accès à tous les services de prise en charge (médicale, psychosociale) sauf l’aspect juridique parce que je l’ai refusé. Je ne veux pas aller devant un tribunal, mais je veux qu’il soit puni, lui et tous les autres qui violent les femmes, les jeunes filles et même les enfants dans mon village.

C’est le FNUAP qui m’a fourni tous les services gratuitement. Comme mesure de prévention des violences sexuelles liées au conflit, les autorités doivent chasser ou désarmer tous les éléments des groupes armés et d’auto-défense communautaire qui sont dans les villages. Ils ne sont pas là pour nous sécuriser mais pour nous violer et voler notre bétail. Ils devraient réhabiliter les points d’eau avec éclairage dans tout le village.

Photo | Nicole Tung

MYANMAR

TESTIMONY FACILITATED BY THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY (UNHCR), COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

I am a 30-year-old woman from Maungdaw, Myanmar. I still remember that day, it was 11 October 2016. It was cloudy as if the rain would start anytime. I was preparing for Zuhr prayer and my husband was getting ready to bring supplies for our shop. I forbade my husband to go as there was news of violence by the army from the adjacent village and there was no traffic on the roads. My husband didn't listen to me and went for supplies as he planned. Soon after he left, my son came with an update that the army was approaching our village. I immediately hid myself with my children in my house. The moment my husband got back with supplies for our shop, the army also arrived and asked my husband for the keys of the school. When my husband said that he did not have them, one of the soldiers slapped his face. But my husband didn't react at all. Shortly after, the army started shooting randomly at the village and one of the bullets hit my husband's chest and he died on the spot. Hearing the news of my husband's death, I felt devastated and I fainted. We took shelter from 12 October to 16 October 2016 in the neighbouring village, as the military had set fire to our village and continued shooting bullets at the people of our village.

On 17 October, after performing Fajr prayer, I went outside to enquire about the turmoil I heard. I saw that soldiers had gathered women, taking them out from the households, and made them sit in the mud. I saw that the soldiers started beating women furiously. Watching such torture, I could not help protesting. They took note of me and separated 25 women, including me, and took us to a school which was near to our shop. After taking us to the school, the soldiers again started torturing us and separated three of us, including me along with two others who were below 18 years old. Then the soldiers forcefully took the two minors to a nearby hill and four soldiers took me to a water reservoir near a lake. The two soldiers pointed their gun at me and the other two soldiers removed my clothes. Then they started raping me one by one. While I was being raped, the other two soldiers kept pointing their guns at me saying they would shoot me if tried to resist or move. I started bleeding but they didn't stop. When the third soldier came to rape me, in pain, I suddenly stretched my leg a bit and it touched that soldier. It made him so angry that he hit my knee with the butt of his gun and immediately after being hit by it, bleeding started from my knee joint. When I looked at one of them, one of the soldiers punched my eye and until today I bear that pain in my eye. As the bleeding continued from both my knee and my vagina, I lost my senses. Apparently, they thought I was dead and left me there naked. When my senses returned, I took one of my clothes and somehow covered the lower part of my body and covered my breasts with my hand. I was still bleeding, and I somehow reached the road. A few little boys saw me, and I lost my senses again. Those little boys informed my family and they came there to take me home. The perpetrators were Myanmar Military wearing greenish military uniforms. I don't know their names but if I see them, I may recognize them. After that incident took place, I informed my family and close relatives about it and I received enormous support from them.

In November 2016, we heard that a high-ranking UN official will visit us to investigate allegations of human rights violations by security forces. Before the visit, the military threatened the villagers with punishment, warning to not try to meet with the UN official. Despite those threats, I bravely came out to meet with the UN official on the day of the visit. I told that UN official all about what happened to me and the official took note of every detail I shared. In the aftermath, the military again returned to our village and killed the translator who helped me during the meeting with the UN official.

The photos are not associated with the testimonies

Photos | Nicole Tung

The military went door to door searching for me, showing my picture. One of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party members came to meet us later, listened to me, and gave me assurance that no further harm will come to us. Unfortunately, after he left, the military came again in search of me and I was sure that they came to kill me. But no one from my village said anything about my whereabouts. After this incident, I got lots of mental support from my family, relatives, and neighbours and no one has ever rejected me or ignored me because of this incident. Especially, I must mention my mother who gave me enormous support from the day I lost my husband until today.

In Myanmar, my family arranged treatment for me, and a doctor provided me with medical treatment after that incident. Soon after I came to Bangladesh, UNHCR arranged health, psychosocial and NFIs [non-food items] support for me as well as they provided me with a community volunteer job opportunity. While in Myanmar, my family had to pay 300,000 Myanmar kyat to the doctor who treated me. In Bangladesh, I didn't have to pay any money for accessing the services. In Myanmar, I didn't get any justice at all for what happened to me. I am still seeking justice, for what happened to me, in a court of law. I've not received any reparations. On the contrary, I was threatened with death for telling the truth about the incident I have undergone. If a strong order from the top of the Myanmar Government to the Myanmar Army had been delegated, barring them from any kind of violence, particularly against women, sexual violence could be prevented. If, like in Bangladesh, an active presence by operational UN agencies could have been there, such violent incidents would be reduced. I am well today and thanks to all of them who have supported me throughout this journey until today. It has been impossible for me to forget what happened to me as those incidents caused a permanent wound in my life. But sometimes I can temporarily forget thanks to my work. I hope to be resettled to a third country along with my two children in order to give them a proper education and a better life.

TESTIMONY FACILITATED BY THE GLOBAL NETWORK OF WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS (GNWP)

My name is XXX and I am 18 years old. I was born in the Rakhine State of Myanmar but it is no longer my home. I spent the last three years living in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. In the camps, we Rohingya women-- young women, and girls face many forms of violence, discrimination, and marginalization. I am one of the few Rohingya refugee young women able to pursue an undergraduate degree. I decided to put my education to good use by advocating for women's rights and gender equality within my community. I led trainings for women, young women, and girls in my camp on women's rights, sexual health, preventing child marriage, and leadership. I would explain that we have the right to study! People in my community were very proud of me. They used to say, "I want to bring my daughter to your training!"

However, my activism also attracted attention from violent extremist groups within the refugee camps that wanted to prevent women, young women, and girls from receiving an education. In their minds, I was not a "good Muslim woman". First, they decided to intimidate me. They made phone calls urging me to stop studying and advocating for women's rights. Members of the violent extremist group came to my home and physically assaulted my father, threatened my family, and stole our belongings, including my books, university ID card, and laptop. When I did not submit to their demands, they kidnapped me. One day in early 2021, they burst out of a tea shop within the refugee camps in front of a crowd of people and seized me. Terrified, I assured them that they did not need to hurt me because I was going to comply with their instructions. They took me to a Mosque. Inside, I noticed a mullah and several people praying. I asked them to help me. But no one did.

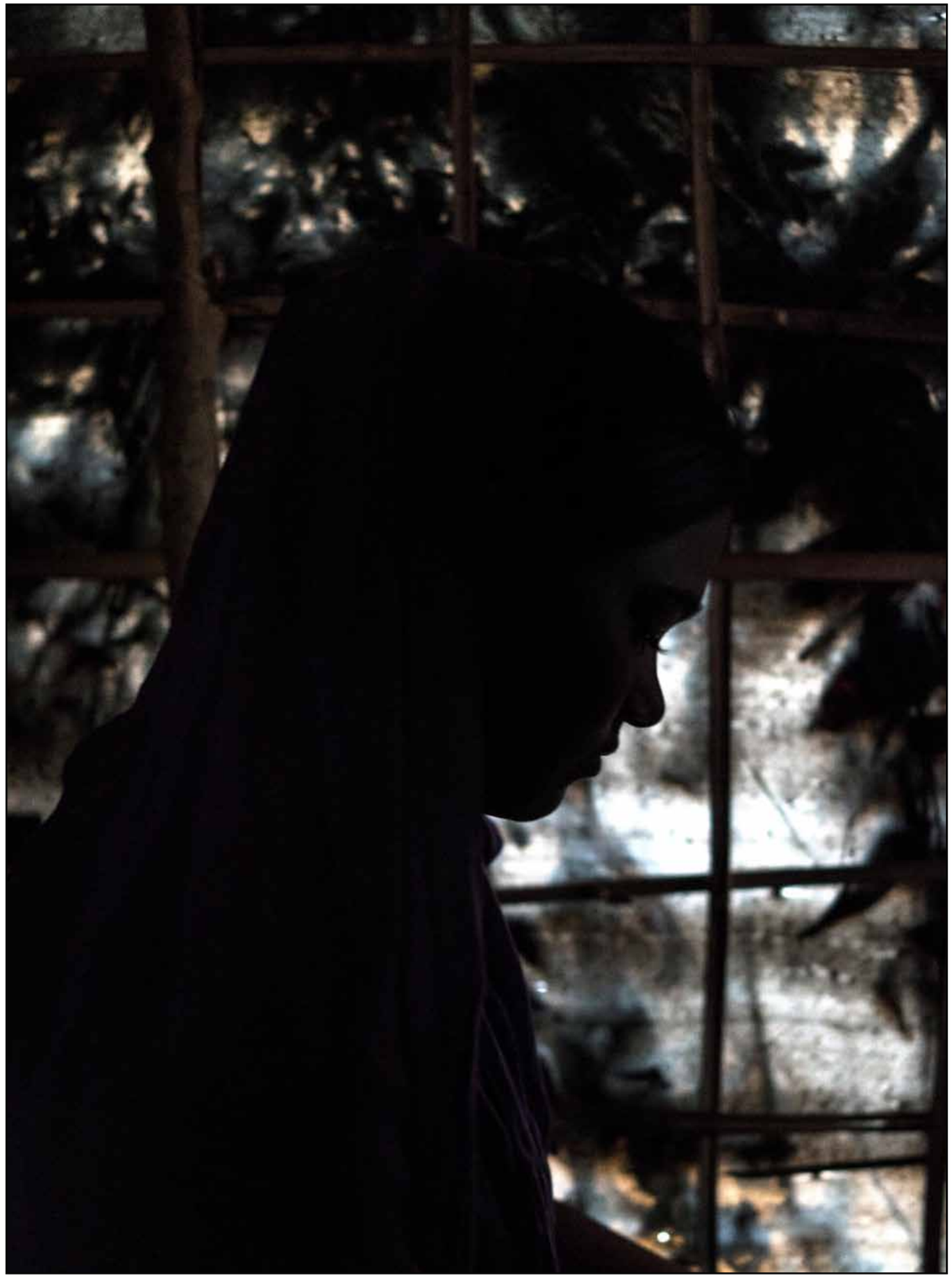
What happened next was worse than I could have imagined. A young man took me to a separate room. I watched him lock the door. I asked him what I could do to be released: "You are Muslim. So am I. We are from the same community. How can I be freed?" I pleaded. He seemed unfazed by my questions. He told me that he wanted nothing from me except my obedience. Then he raped me. It lasted for three painful, terrifying hours. My body, heart, and mind felt paralyzed. I struggled to answer the questions he asked me. I kept thinking to myself, "They raped me because I am studying". Nevertheless, I mustered up the courage to follow their instructions and negotiate my release. They extorted money for my release from my family and colleagues from civil society. When they received a ransom of 50,000 Bangladesh Taka, they let me go.

The camp was still and dark when I returned to my home. I struggled to wash my body and sleep, still shaking from the horrors I had experienced. The Site Manager I was in contact with asked me a lot of questions, which I did not have the energy to answer. I was given a room to stay in and taken to the hospital. The female doctor I saw recommended that I stay in the hospital for eleven days for adequate treatment for bleeding and severe pain in the lower abdomen. But I felt unsafe staying in the hospital for that long. The perpetrators could easily find me there. I didn't want to fall into their hands again.

The fear of being targeted again by the violent extremist group prevented me from reporting the incident and seeking justice. My case would be immediately investigated by the Bangladeshi military, site management, and the Camp-in-Charge. This could endanger me and my family further. In the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, there is no safety after 6:30PM, when the community protection officers, humanitarian workers, and government officials leave. We call the violent extremist group the "night government". Once the sun sets, they are in complete control of the refugee camps. They lay down the law and enforce it as they see fit, including by inflicting violence on people who do not comply. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the refugee camps more insecure, especially for women, young women, and girls. Most of us are not able to access learning centers or women friendly spaces. Although humanitarian workers have assured me that the reporting mechanisms are confidential, I know that they are not. If an arrest needs to be made, it will not be able to stay confidential. Many people in my community will also be shocked if they find out what happened to me. They will see me in a different light – perhaps not as a "good girl" anymore. I cannot trust them.

Instead, I leaned on my family and colleagues from civil society and the United Nations (UN) for support. My colleagues from civil society and the UN helped my family and I escape the camps and find safe housing. They replaced my laptop and books so that I could continue studying. I gained access to psychosocial counselling and medical treatment. Thankfully, I am not bleeding anymore. But my brain does not seem to be working as it used to before the incident. My family has also been a great source of support. They could have asked why I am endangering them to pursue an education. However, they have not. They are proud of me. They know that I have the power to change my community. The sexual violence I endured broke my heart and mind – not my spirit! I am persisting. I am completely in control of my destiny.

I know that by educating the women, young women, and girls in the refugee camps, we will be able to shape the world and demand accountability for the protection, preservation, and promotion of our rights. To prevent sexual violence and protect women, young women, and girls, we need to build broad-based support for women's rights and improve security in the refugee camps after 6:30 PM. I want to be a role model for other Rohingya girls in my community. I don't want violent extremists to use me as an example to intimidate all other girls from studying!



UNICEF Photo | Tanya Bindra

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY MS. RAZIA SULTANA, CHAIRPERSON OF RW WELFARE SOCIETY

Photos facilitated by RW Welfare Society

I am XXX and I am 17 years old. My family and I are Burmese. I read in class 7 at Burma school. When I was in Burma every morning, I went to Madrasa to read the holy Quran. Then I used to eat breakfast and go to school. After returning home, I went to the field with my friends for hanging out. We played hide and seek. We stole lemon from the lemon garden and we ate. When I read in class 6, many boys made bad comments. Then I passed class 6 and I got promoted at class 7 and worse comments started. Then my mother stopped my study. I spent my time in my house. I was a nice girl, so my family didn't allow me to go out. Muslim precaution started at Burma.

Suddenly, the military started capturing men from their homes. They tortured the girls. Whenever the military came to our house my mother hid me. Day by day, this violence was increasing in Barma. One day the soldiers came our house again with their leaders. They said all family members must go outside. My mother hid me so the leaders said, "One person is missing". They asked where is that person. The soldiers searched for me and caught me. My family tried to save me. The military locked me in one room. Soldiers came in that room and raped me one by one and tortured me physically. I stayed there 1 month. One day I ran away from there. At that time, I was already pregnant for about 8 months. Someone helped me across a river. I heard that my whole family came to Bangladesh. I started to search for them. At last, I found them. After few days I went to my parent's home with my son. Now I live in a camp where I gave birth to my son. I don't know who his father is. Because all military raped me, as their wish they used me. But nobody married me.

I married at the age of 15 in Myanmar. My husband worked in agriculture to run the family. Suddenly the persecution of Muslims began in Myanmar. All Muslims ran here and there. My family ran away to save our lives. We could not escape because of the hills around their area and the huge canal on one side. All villagers moved towards the char. We could not cross the canal because of the water flow of the canal. The military moved towards the char. Although the villagers fled, the military understood that there were still some Muslims left. Then the military started firing and started cutting people. One third percent of people were already dead. Among them there was my husband, who was shot first and then hacked to death with a large knife. Then they killed one of my sons in the same way. Seeing this killing, the villagers surrendered and said, "Don't kill us". Then the military told everyone to go home. When they went home, they started to shoot them again and set the houses on fire. Small children were scattered and killed; some children were thrown into the water. Like everyone else, I also entered the house with my daughter and 4-year-old son. The military raped me in front of my daughter and son. They hit me with a knife in the head. The military took the small son from my daughter and hacked him to death. My daughter was also raped and cut. **"I was held down by six men and raped by five of them. He stuck a knife into my head. That was how they kept me in place. … I was trying to move and was bleeding more. They didn't leave my daughter at all. They were threatening to shoot me. All of my body was damaged'**. The military thought we were both dead. She had gold earrings in her ears. The military opened one earring but could not open the other earring. Not being able to open the other earring, they cut it with a knife and took the pendant. She was hit with the knife in the head three times so that they thought that she died. Then they went out and set the house on fire. her daughter came to her senses and started calling her mother. Her senses also came back. We broke the fence of the house and escaped from the fire and flew towards the hill. We stayed in the mountains for seven days. After crossing the canal, we reached Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Army helped us and admitted us to Cox's Bazar Hospital. We were treated at the hospital. Her head was once full of hair, but I had to throw away all the hair to sew. No one was alive in my father's house and my father's–in-law house. Everyone has died except me and my daughter. I am grateful to the people of Bangladesh for giving us shelter. Only my daughter and I are left in the family.

Photo | Bishnu Kalpit

NEPAL

TESTIMONY FACILITATED BY THINK-FILM IMPACT PRODUCTION

My name is Devi Khadka. I am 42 years old now. When I was 17, I was arrested by the Nepal Police and gang-raped by them. I was arrested around the festival of Tihar, a festival that celebrates the victory of good against evil. After they arrested me, they tortured me for almost a month. I begged them to shoot me. 'Why waste our bullets on you? You're going to die of shame and humiliation as a piece of crap.'

My older brother had joined the Maoists as a guerilla leader. The police wanted to know where he was. He had gone underground. How would I know his whereabouts? On 9th of November 1997, the commander then said: 'She's his favourite sister. If we rape her, she might kill herself or go mad. It will force him to surrender. It will be a wound that drives him mad.' I lost consciousness. It was only recently that I found out that 17 men raped me. When I was finally released, my brother organised for me to go to Kathmandu. I was like a mad woman. The Maoist party leaders decided to hold a press conference. I agreed to that. There were some human rights activists and lots of press. Many articles were written about me, shaming me and humiliating me.

When I went home, I found my parents talking among themselves. Mother said that she wished I had died after the rape. Our society is very conservative. It sees rape as a loss of honour. I was so ashamed of myself that I tried to kill myself. But instead, I joined the rebels. I wanted to fight and die in a battle. That helped me live. After the peace process, when I tried to bring attention to wartime rape in 2008, I was knocked down by a police car. My children were small and I backed out.

It's taken me a long time to heal. During COVID lockdowns, I found space and time to think about wartime rape. Now, I am in the process of organising other women, who still live in fear of being found out as a wartime rape survivors. There are hundreds of women like me. I want Nepal's leaders to recognise wartime rape. I want all of us to live with dignity.

SOMALIA

TESTIMONY FACILITATED BY THE UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE MISSION IN SOMALIA (UNSOM), OFFICE OF THE SENIOR WOMEN PROTECTION ADVISOR

I am Luul Ali Geele (not my real name to maintain the confidentiality), I am a woman of 25 years old and I am from Hakaba, Walaweyn District, Lower Shabelle Region. The incident happened to me at my house yard in February 2021. I was at home with my three kids, we were giving to the animals some hay that I collected using my donkey cart. Three men approached me at around 4-5 PM. They asked me about my husband's whereabouts, and I answered that he is dead. They kept on insisting I should tell them about him, they thought that I was hiding him just to protect him. In the village there was ongoing fighting between two community groups that were residing in that locality and my husband happened to be one of them. Two of the men took my donkey and disappeared and they left one man who was armed with a knife, AK 47 and a big stick. He came close to me and started to strangle me, and he forced me to lie down after he warned me that he will stab me if I didn't cooperate with him. He shook my two hands with his single hand and started raping me in my own backyard. I started to cry but there were no men around to rescue me.

A young boy of around eight years old found out what was happening to me and ran away to a distant farm to call for men to come to rescue me but, unfortunately, they came when the perpetrator was gone. The perpetrator was in a hurry and he left his knife and long stick behind. I took the knife and the stick and just kept on crying loudly. The perpetrator was an unidentified man, armed and wearing civilian clothes. His dialect was not from the local community as mine. I identified him as a man with a beard and was chewing Mira. I never knew him, but I will be able to spot him if find him around.

I never reported the incident as there are no reporting facilities around the village. On top of that the incident happened in the countryside where there are no designated facilities for reporting or even seeking medical care for such kind of violence. We fled to Mogadishu myself and my kids and currently we live in IDPs settlements. We came after two weeks to Mogadishu and Somali Women and Child Care Association (SWCCA) GBV staff provided me psychosocial support services, medical services, dignity kits and basic package foods.

The incident happened at the rural place where there were no services that have been provided to me. I faced discrimination, stigma and blaming from the family, friends and relatives and community members instead of empathetic about the tragic incident happened to me, which forced me to flee to Mogadishu.

When I came to Mogadishu, I have received medical services, dignity kits, psychosocial support services and basic foods packages from SWCCA. I tried to report to the village elders, but no one knew the perpetrator and no action has been taken by the traditional elders, and I couldn't recognize him by name or where he hails from. I believe if there were safety systems in place at around the incident place or presence of my husband or other men around the homesteads some of these incidents could have been averted. There is no police station located in my village. The restriction of movement due to COVID-19 had impacted me because there were no services been offered at the incident station. I have to flee to Mogadishu that took me two weeks in route.

SOUTH SUDAN

Photo UNMISS | Eric Kanalstein

TESTIMONIES FACILITATED BY THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SOUTH SUDAN (UNMISS)

I would rather not disclose my name or the name of my organization. I am constantly under State surveillance. Recently, I was arrested for the third time since 2018 for speaking out against impunity for crimes of sexual violence in conflict. I am a human rights activist from the Equatoria region. I often provide free legal aid service to CRSV survivors, referrals to those who need services (e.g., medical, and psychosocial support). I also actively engage with communities to advocate for peace and reconciliation.

Since the eruption of the conflict in 2013, every year less and fewer crimes of sexual violence in conflict are reported; thus, many assume that it has decreased due to the peace agreement and implementation of commitments made by parties to the conflict to address CRSV. However, the reality on the ground is that nothing has changed and, rather there has been more suppression and censorship against survivors, activists and human rights defenders not to report and speak out against such crimes and condemn perpetrators.

Speaking out against crimes of sexual violence by armed groups is very dangerous in South Sudan. In my experience, anyone who speaks out will be subsequently labeled as a rebel or someone who is conspiring for a regime change.

This conflict has been systematically utilized to turn one tribe against the other in order to create resentment and divide among communities. For example, by arming youth community militias and cattle keepers who perpetually committing human rights violations including rape and gang rape against civilians. Through my community engagement and reconciliation activities, I manage to resound the dangers of such acts and its generational impact to some extent. I believe I am contributing on a smaller scale. I have seen a change in the youth of communities I often engage for peace and reconciliation. However, we need more human rights defenders and activists to speak up and engage with communities.

I have been through horrific experiences speaking out against the crimes of conflict-related sexual violence. I was arrested three times from 2018 to 2021 and, currently, I am forced to regularly report to the security office. They have seized my passport claiming that I am working against the interest of the government and, more than once, they even tried to kill me. I fear for my life and I don't sleep in the same place, I don't go to the same shop, I always monitor my surrounding to see if I am being followed. A senior security officer has warned me that I will be killed if I keep going against the interest of the government. I represented survivors of sexual violence in conflict and eyewitnesses of mass rape in Equatoria, which were launched at the order of a senior commander of the government forces. The victims and eyewitnesses were arrested to silence them from speaking out and testifying. We were able to prove that they were detained because they are survivors and witnesses of the mass rape. The case against the individuals was dismissed at the end.

Survivors of CRSV and their families in this country have immediate and long-term needs; as I said, impunity is the major problem hence, those who suffered violations at the hands of armed groups need justice, reparations, and provisions of services.

As an activist who has witnessed the plight of civilians on many occasions, I would like to see more political pressure on the government by allied countries to remove impunity and bring perpetrators of CRSV to justice, including senior members of the force. Regional institutions such as the African Union Commission and East African Community need to denounce the lack of willingness to protect women and children in this conflict. The major threat is institutional impunity and individual compromise. Armed forces should be held accountable for all the systematic and calculated crimes they sponsor and actively commit including crimes of sexual violence. The commitments they make on papers should be implemented, and if not, there should be tangible consequences. There should be a national-uniform plan to address the use of sexual violence as a weapon. Lack of sustainable resources to implement programmatic activities such as reconciliation among communities is the major hindrance to my work. Mobilization of the youth from different communities and building the capacity of human rights defenders in the country requires sustainable resources. If I can mobilize people on the grassroots level as a watchdog of human rights violations, we will have ears and eyes across the country to report on the crimes of sexual violence. Furthermore, activists like me also would be less visible and targeted by the government.

Due to restrictions of movement placed following COVID-19 we are facing difficulty monitoring and investigating reported incidents as well as mobilizing communities. It has been very difficult to meet and talk to victims and witnesses of CRSV.

UN Photo | Mark Garten

UN Photo | JC McIlwaine

My name is XXX, I am a 32-year-old male from Unity State. I provide medical treatments and counseling services to rehabilitate and empower survivors of sexual violence. I also organize educational activities to raise awareness on issues related to GBV/CRSV to survivors of sexual violence, their families and communities.

Some things have changed for the better although, we still face challenges. The encouraging developments include - the communities I often engage with have fostered a good understanding of issues related to SGBV/CRSV hence, in the last couple of months, cases of sexual violence have decreased compared to last year in the same period. There are fewer attacks/lootings against civilians, so people are moving freely from one location to another.

Another example is that, from February 2021 until now, I am delivering training to the youth who are accustomed to carrying weapons wherever they go. However, after they joined the training, they started to change, leaving their weapons at home, or handing it over to someone else. However, revenge attacks are common among communities.

Based on my experiences, CRSV crimes occur everywhere, however, most of the perpetrators come from outside, not from our community. Usually, perpetrators will come in groups or alone carrying weapons, such as guns or spears to a location nobody knows them.

I have been working with survivors since 2018. There are a lot of things that happened in this area; many women and children were raped and killed, but still the perpetrators could roam around freely with no legal consequences. There was one incident in 2019 (I don't remember the exact date) - I received information about a 14-year-old girl who was raped. I met the survivor and offered services including medical support and counseling. I also assisted both the survivor and the mother to report the incident to the police. The police then started an investigation and arrested the perpetrator. However, after five days in prison, the perpetrator escaped without undergoing a trial process; the police were not doing their job properly.

Survivors need better medical services in health facilities close to their village so that they don't have to walk far exposing themselves to further risks. Most survivors don't have access to education and essential personal items such as proper clothes and shoes. Additionally, both single and married women usually express that they want to get skills training so they can improve their lives.

My area of responsibility covers many Payams, I have to commute 20–30 km for 2–3 hours by foot, which limits my mobility. So not having access to transportation, perhaps a bicycle hinders my work. I also need further training to improve my skills, share my experience and gain more knowledge regarding psychosocial approaches. I also would like to have access to promotional materials such as t-shirts, water containers, as a way of approaching community members.

Whenever I conduct training in a certain location, participants will be more numerous than those invited. This usually impacts the training budget, including the sitting allowance, refreshments, etc. We also don't have access to relevant materials that are pertinent to expand participants' understanding of CRSV/SGBV related issues after awareness-raising training.

Routine security patrols are crucial methods to prevent the commission of CRSV. Those who have weapons are usually the ones threatening people and perpetuating sexual violence, so disarmament is also another key step to prevent CRSV.

The photos are not associated with the testimonies

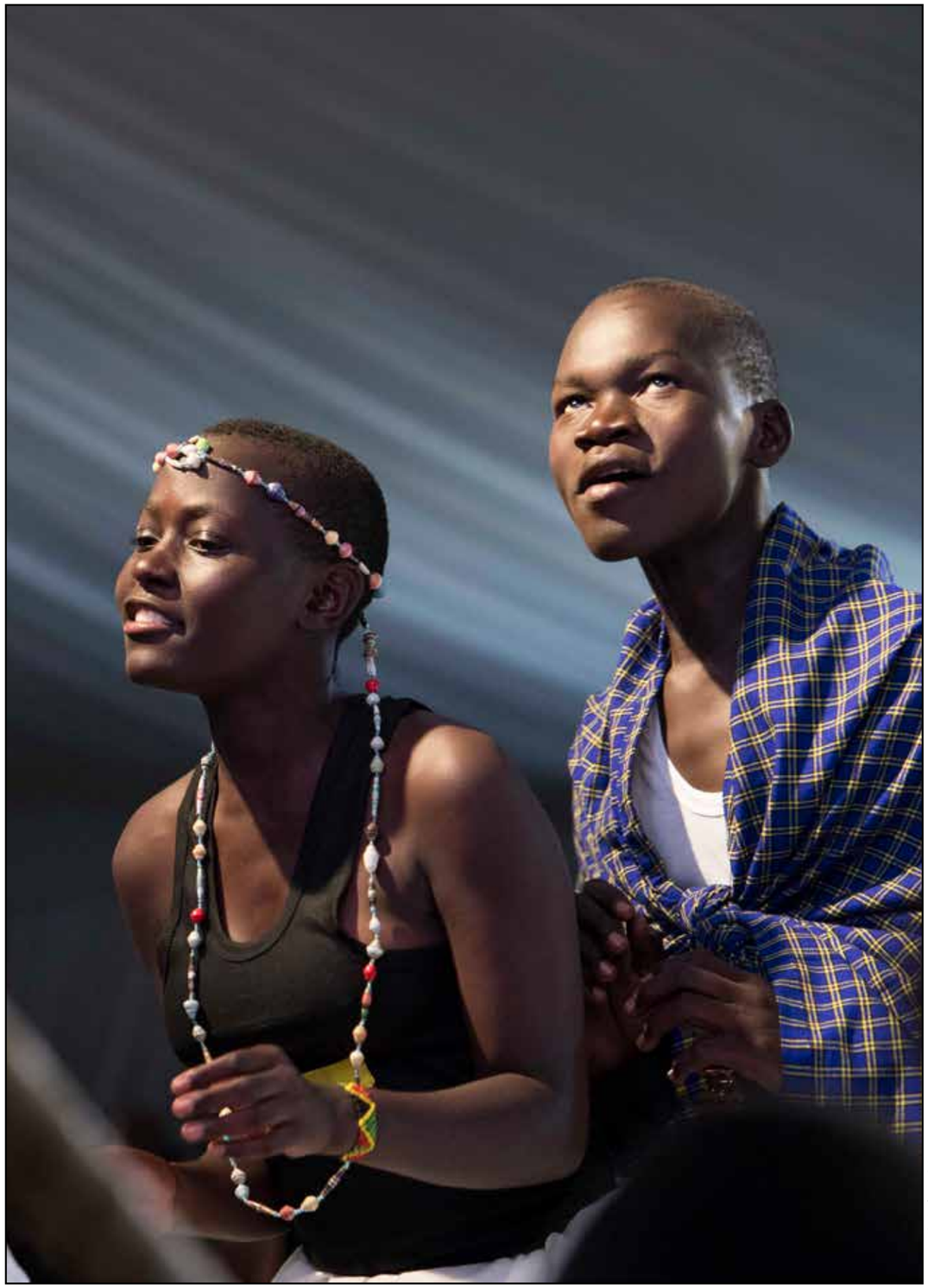
My name is XXX, I am a 19-year-old married woman from Unity State. On 11 May 2020, at around 23h30, I was in my parent's tukul. I was sleeping in the same room with my mother, my aunt, and my young brother, when we heard a knock on our door. We were told to open the door of our tukul by these unknown men who invaded our home. When we refused to open the door, they pushed the door and forced their way into our tukul. The unknown men were about six in number, armed and in civilian clothing. They were speaking Nuer with the accent of Leer. They ordered us to give them alcohol, mobile phones and money. My mother told them that we are poor villagers and possessed none of the requested items. They immediately took their sticks and started beating us. I was badly assaulted with the sticks as well as my mother and my brother. As we were being assaulted, two out of the six-armed men told me to get out at gunpoint. They did not take me outside our compound but took me between my parents' tukul where the two armed men gang raped me at gunpoint. After the ordeal, they called those who were inside my parents' tukul and left our compound along with my clothes and other valuable items.

I reported the incident to the UNMISS Ghanaian peacekeeping contingent, I was treated with dignity and respect. They also provided me with counseling and told me that if I develop any sickness, I should report immediately for further examination and treatment. Similarly, when I reported the incident to the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS), they assured me that they will do their best to arrest the suspects and hold them accountable. However, my case was not transferred to court and the perpetrators remain at large.

I was not treated differently despite what happened to me. My friends and family were very supportive. My boyfriend was also very supportive and did not change his mind regarding our plan to get married. My friends and relatives supported me a lot, especially in the preparation of my wedding. I got married in September and now I'm five-month pregnant. I received free medical care from Doctors without Borders (MSF). They were very friendly and supportive, and I was happy with the services. I did not go for psychosocial support as I did not want to continue sharing my ordeal with many people.

I was sexually assaulted in my tukul in the presence of my family members. The perpetrators were armed and there was nothing that my family and my neighbors could have done to protect me from being sexually assaulted at the time. However, I believe that only the fear of the law can stop these armed men from attacking civilians. If the law is fully implemented and anyone suspected of committing sexual violence is arrested and prosecuted, then they will stop attacking women and girls.

The incident happened during the COVID-19 pandemic when the restrictions of movements were already imposed but did not stop me from seeking medical attention and reporting to the police. When I was sexually assaulted, Leer had not yet recorded any confirmed case of COVID-19, so people were moving easily.



UN Photo | Mark Garten

My name is XXX, I am a 38-year-old woman from a rural area in Central Equatoria State. On 9 December 2020, at around 2 pm, I left my house in the village along with four women to fetch firewood from the nearby village. On the day of the incident, I went to pick firewood in an abandoned village, with other women, where from time-to-time criminal cases have been reported. It is an area where there is neither presence of the government forces nor the rebels. Sometimes rebels and criminals have been spotted in this area, but we still visit the area since it's the closest to our village. If we go further away, we would be in rebel-held territory. After we had picked enough firewood, I heard a woman shouting "run". So, I threw down the firewood and started running but it was too late. The other women were ahead of me and were already getting out of sight. I was grabbed by my t-shirt and as I fell on the ground. There were two men, and one of them was armed with an AK47 rifle. They were wearing civilian clothes. From their facial appearance and their local Arabic accent, they could have been either rebels or criminals. I tried to scream but the armed one cocked his gun and held me at gunpoint. He told me that "If you scream, I will shoot you". The other one came on top of me as I laid there on the ground. He removed my underwear by force and after unzipping his trousers he raped me as the other one watched. As he raped me, he said "You people are the stubborn ones. We tell you not to live in the government-controlled areas, but you never listen". I closed my face with my hands so that I could not see but the pain was too much to bear. Tears came from my eyes. Then after he had finished, he took the gun from his colleague who also came on top of me and raped me. They let me go after telling me that they had taught me a lesson so that I will not go to XXX village again. The perpetrators were unknown and wore no uniform. They had only one gun and from their facial appearance, accent and from what they said during the ordeal they could be rebels. However, that area is also frequented by criminals.

I told my sister at home about what happened to me and she advised me to go to the hospital so if I had contracted an STI or pregnancy I could be helped. The next day I reported the incident to the hospital where I received medical and counseling services. I did not report the incident to the police because I did not want many people to know about what happened to me. Besides, I could not identify the perpetrators and the woman with whom we had gone to fetch firewood said that she did not want to be dragged into the investigation.

I was not treated differently by my family but, a couple of times, as I passed by the neighbors I felt as if they are talking about me.

At the hospital, I was checked by the medical doctor before I was given medication for free and informed to go back to the hospital from time to time to receive psychosocial support. I was given a dignity kit, clothes, food, and some money for transportation.

To prevent what happened to me, women must be more careful while going to collect food or firewood and there should be more government patrols in the area to ensure the safety of the vulnerable women.

The incident happened during COVID-19 but, in my area, there were less than five confirmed cases so there are no restrictions of movement.

UN Photo | Albert Gonzalez Farran

UN Photo/Staton Winter

The photos are not associated with the testimonies

My name is XXX, I am 56 years old. I am a Kakwa by tribe from a rural area in Central Equatoria State. I am a father to a minor who is a survivor of gang rape. On 9 March 2019, I was at a funeral place when my cousin came to me with my niece to tell me that my 15-year-old daughter Mary was gang raped by government soldiers at the roadside. It was around 8 pm when I got the news. My daughter had already been taken to the hospital. I rushed to the hospital and found that she had already been attended to by the nurses but would need to see a doctor the next day. On 10 March 2019, she received medical attention and was taken back home where a counselor from an NGO continued to visit her from time to time. She was given a dignity kit, soap, some clothes, and transport money to go back home. The perpetrators were five government soldiers who were drunk and were on their way back to their barracks about 10 km from Yei town. Two of them gang raped my daughter but only one was arrested. Three of them were armed but only two of them wore the army uniform. However, the two who gang raped my daughter were in civilian clothes.

On 9 March 2019 at around 8pm my daughter's case had already been reported to the hospital, so the next day, I reported the incident to the police. After reporting to the police, I went to the government barracks where one of the perpetrators was being held. I am also a government soldier but because the soldier (the perpetrator arrested) is from the dominant Dinka tribe, the case was always being interfered with by other high-ranking officers who happen to be relatives of the perpetrator. The other perpetrators were never arrested. I also went to the Commissioner of my County to pursue legal action to no avail.

I was worried about how my daughter would be treated at school but with time I think people stopped talking about her. In the neighborhood, they simply sympathized with her.

I tried to bring the perpetrators to the civil court, but it failed because there were high-ranking officers who were interfering with the process. However, in July 2020 the District Court Martial convicted and sentenced one of the perpetrators arrested to six-year prison terms and dismissal from the army. The court further ordered the perpetrator to pay reparations of two cows and a sum of 500,000 South Sudanese pound (SSP) to my daughter. My daughter still hasn't received the reparations ordered by the court.

I did not pay any medical costs or any legal or court fees. The only cost I incurred was 100 SSP to get 'Form 8' from the police station. The problem is with the military. There should be regular awareness-raising programmes delivered to members of the force, focusing on legal responsibility for crimes of sexual violence.

My daughter was raped before the COVID-19 pandemic, however now due to the pandemic and its related restrictions she cannot go to school.

SYRIA

Photo IRIN | Arianna Pagani

The photos are not associated with the testimonies

My name is XXX and I am 27 years old. I was born in Damascus, Syria. I am married and I have two daughters. I was arrested by government forces and detained as a result of the war in my country.

While I was detained in the Air Force Intelligence Branch in 2015 in Damascus, a prison guard asked me to put the laundry in the garden outside the cell. I went there to do so and he started harassing me. He covered my mouth and told me not to scream because nobody would believe me anyway. He took my veil off and started kissing me on my mouth and my neck. He relieved himself on me. The second time, he took off my shirt and kissed my breasts, my face and my neck and relieved himself once again without even taking off his clothes. After that, he sexually abused me several times, around 7 or 8. He would take off my clothes until I was completely naked. He would open up his pants and start kissing me and touching my breasts. This would always happen outside, between the trees. He would rub his penis against my body and ejaculate on my thighs. He would then pull back my pants and bring me inside the cell. I would go directly to the bathroom and cry. I would feel weak and emotionally broken. When the other inmates asked me why my eyes were red, I would tell them that it was because of allergies. I did not tell any of them about what happened to me. I only told one other female detainee and she told me there was nothing I could do except surrender.

What happened in detention had a huge impact on my life. I was humiliated and people talked about me, about the loss of my honour. People said I was inventing these stories to get benefits. Before getting my temporary protection card in Turkey, I had to pay for services. I even had to pay when I gave birth. Now, these services are free of charge.

As a result of COVID, my husband lost his job and this had a deep financial effect on our family. I was then forced to work and be away from my children, which was very difficult for me. I was still breastfeeding my daughters and I was forced to wean them because I spent long hours at work. I had to take public transportation on my own and come back home late. People would harass me in public transportation, and this reminded me of what I had experienced in detention. I got pregnant and I suffered a lot to get access to medical care because of the pandemic. Before the COVID outbreak, I used to receive psychological support and although it would made me feel so much better to talk to a doctor, I had to stop because I did not find it useful to conduct the sessions over the phone. Then the medical service provider told me that I was fine and they stopped giving me the psychological support. I was also being treated for my teeth but I had to stop the treatment when the pandemic started because of our financial problems, and also because most dentist clinics were closed.

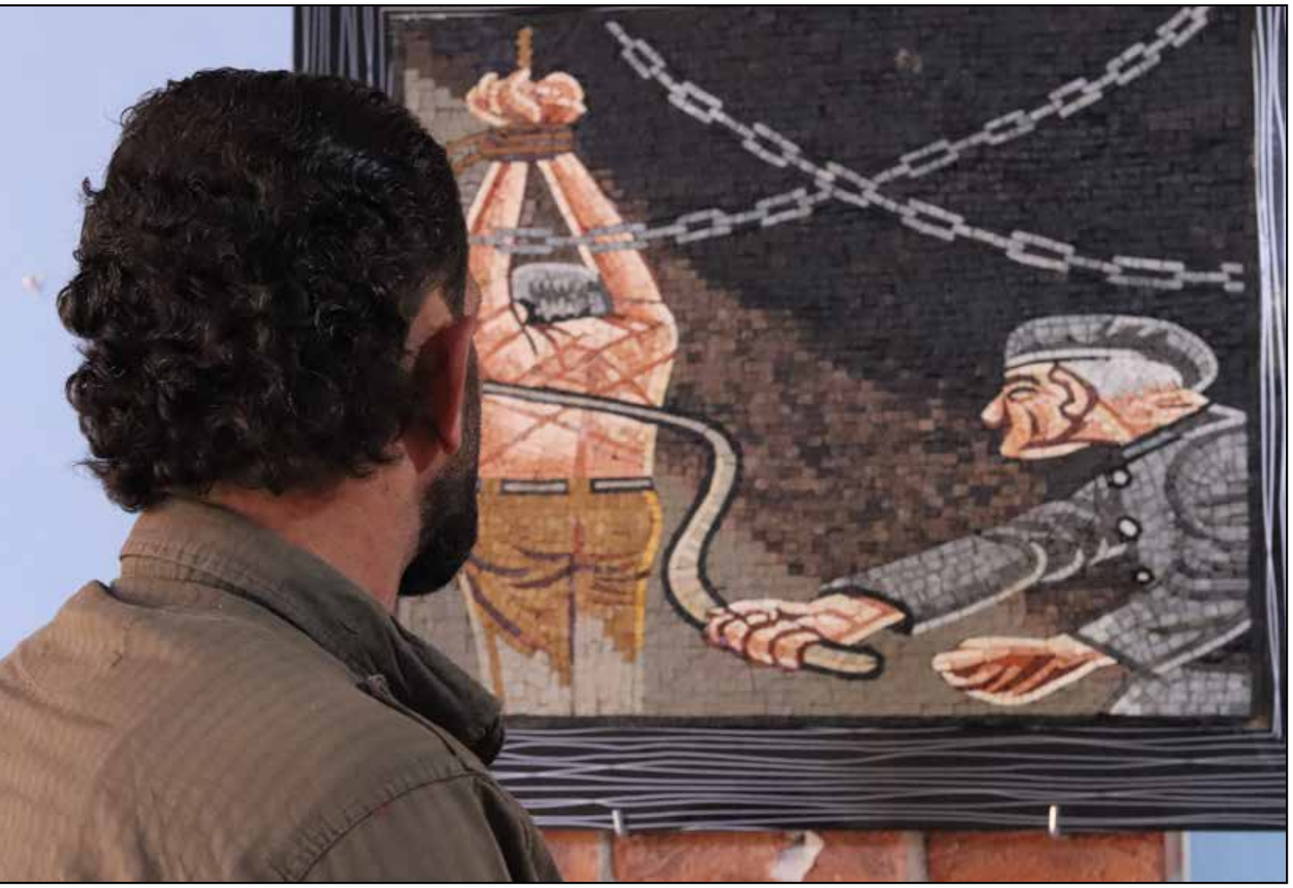


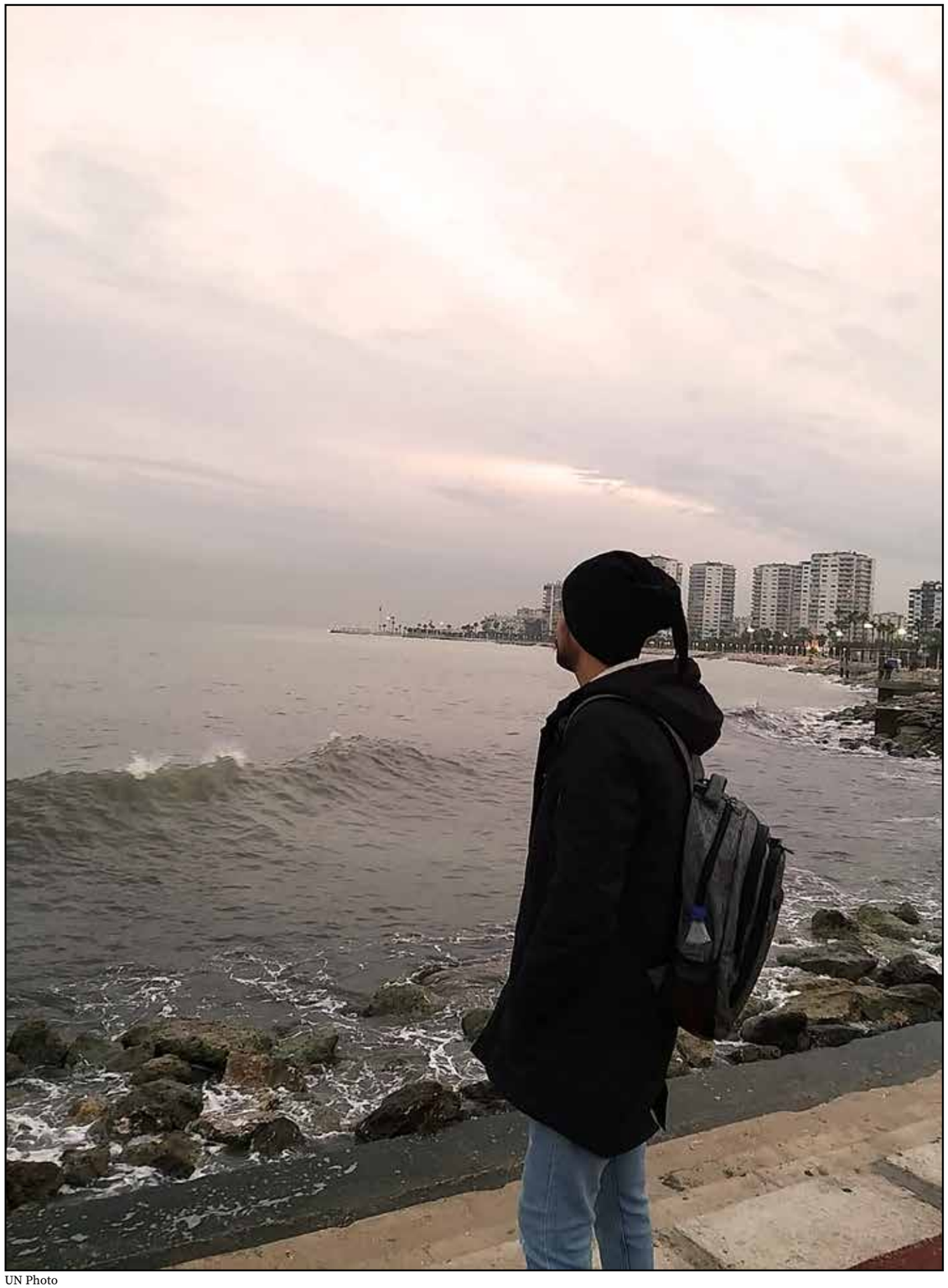
Photo | Abdulrazzaq al-Tawil

My name is XXX and I am 24 years old. I am from the Damascus suburbs. When the Syrian revolution started in 2011, I began organising peaceful demonstrations against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, using social media. I was the founder of a social media group for the students in my area. I was a 17-year-old student at the time. I participated in several demonstrations in my town, which was under the control of the Free Syrian Army. Then the regime besieged it, bombarded it and took control of it. Many residents fled to a neighbouring town, including my family. I continued my studies there and resumed my activities under a different name.

In April 2014, when I was going shopping, a car with dark tinted windows approached me and one of the passengers called me by my own name, although people in the town where I was living did not know me under that name. Two other cars arrived and circled me. My uncle was inside one of the cars and it was clear that he had been tortured. His face was swollen, with cuts. He looked extremely scared. My uncle confirmed my name to them, and I could not deny it, because he is elderly and I could not blame him and let them torture him again. As a result, I was arrested, handcuffed, blindfolded and put in the trunk of the car where my uncle was, and taken to a checkpoint of the 14th Division of the Syrian Army. During the arrest, they hit me with their hands and the butt of a rifle on my whole body, especially my back and my shoulders. They also kicked me, insulted me and humiliated me.

At the 14th Division, they tortured me, physically and psychologically. They even asked me to describe the private parts of my aunt (my uncle's wife). When they interrogated my uncle, they also asked him the same type of questions about his mother, her body and how many times he had sex with her. They forced us to respond and I was forced to insult my uncle and say in front of him that I had sex with his wife. They were experts in psychological torture. They tied my waist with a rope and pulled me around, like an animal. I felt powerless, deeply humiliated, and was extremely angry. Then started the physical torture. They sent a person specialised in torture to deal with me. He tied my feet and kicked my face until it was swollen. He would pull me from my hair and throw me on the floor so I would land on my face. He did it several times. He also hit me with a water pipe and with an electric wire on my whole body, including my knees and my fingernails. I lost a fingernail because of that. He then stripped me naked, threw cold water on me and electrocuted me. He hit me with a heated metal stick and burned my back. He made "drawings" on my back with the heated stick. He then inserted the stick in my anus, and I felt extreme pain and humiliation. This is a memory that I will never forget. He threatened to rape me in front of everyone. He did not do it but the threat in itself made me hysterical. He used pliers to pinch my nipples and my penis.

I had many nightmares after my detention. I lost trust in people, even in my family and close friends. I became isolated, insomniac, lost my appetite and my self-confidence. I was depressed and I felt profound shame because of the sexual violence I was subjected to. The COVID-19 pandemic made it worse. After my release, I was forced to live on the university campus so I did not have to go through checkpoints and be at risk of getting arrested again. With COVID-19, the campus got closed and I did not know where to go. I could not leave the campus so I hid there for seven months. I was at risk of being arrested anytime and found myself living in another prison. An empty one. I lived in constant fear of getting caught. After my graduation, I fled the area and managed to enter [a third Country], where I now live.



UN Photo

My name is Dr. M. and I am a medical doctor working for Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights. My organization works with Syrian survivors of torture and sexual violence. The vast majority of them were subjected to abuses while in government-run detention facilities, at the hands of government officials. My work consists of conducting physical and psychological examinations to document the abuses they were subjected to, in view of building expert reports that can be shared with international justice actors working on accountability for crimes committed during the Syrian conflict and used in criminal proceedings. We operate in Syria and Turkey, and we work with a network of service providers who can offer survivors medical, psycho-social and legal support.

The COVID-19 pandemic highly affected my work and that of my organisation, especially regarding our documentation activities. Our work is highly sensitive and we strictly apply the principle of "do no harm". After some discussions we had internally and with our partners, we decided to stop our documentation work for a period of more than six months. We decided against conducting online/remote interviews because of the nature of the medical examination which does not allow us to conduct it remotely, but also because we felt we would not be able to provide our survivors the same level of support. As a result, we were not able to identify the survivors' needs and refer them to the required support services. This had an impact that we are unable to measure but that we assume was huge.

We then put in place procedures in order to resume our documentation activities while avoiding the spread of the virus. The interviewing process now includes a part on Covid-19, which takes up time from the interview. From our conversations with the survivors, we noticed that the pandemic had disastrous impacts on them. While their social and economic life had been deeply affected by their detention and the horrific abuses they were subjected to, these impacts were intensified by the pandemic. More importantly, their work opportunities became more scarce, they isolated themselves even more than they already had, and they experienced even more difficulties accessing essential medical services. Notably, some health centres and hospitals in North-Western Syria stopped operating during the pandemic. Some started providing services over the phone, which is not appropriate for the survivors we work with, who suffer from trauma due to what they experienced in detention. Some health centres and hospitals were transformed in order to deal only with COVID-19 patients and stopped providing other services. Therefore, the survivors of torture and sexual violence we work with found themselves without access to these services.

The pandemic also affected the way my organisation operates. Conducting our meetings and training courses online and not being able to meet each other and work together in person also created some challenges.

Daniil, a survivor of sexual violence, in a hotel in Kyiv. August 2025. Photo | Ximena Borrazás.

My name is Daniil Bulhakov and I am from Donetsk. Before my captivity, I lived an ordinary life: I studied, worked at a school for some time, and repaired computers at home. On the morning of 19 August 2020, my life changed completely. Armed men broke into my apartment, accused me of being a spy, and put a bag over my head. That moment marked the end of my former life.

I was detained by the Russian forces in Donetsk and held in captivity for more than three years. During the first months, I was kept in secret detention under what they called an 'administrative arrest.' My family did not know where I was; I had no access to a lawyer, and no official record of my detention existed. During this time, I was interrogated and tortured repeatedly. Torture was daily. Electric shocks were used on different parts of my body, causing unbearable pain and loss of consciousness. Later, more severe methods followed. My teeth were deliberately damaged during interrogations, leaving me with permanent dental problems that still affect my health today. At first, they filed down two of my side teeth using a small diamond-coated file. By New Year's, from 2020 to 2021, they had become so badly infected that I couldn't open my mouth. They eventually brought a doctor and had the remaining stumps removed.

After the interrogations, I was transferred to Izoliatsiia, an unofficial detention facility known for extreme cruelty. There, torture took different forms: hunger, fear, humiliation, and constant violence. We were given almost no food and often had no access to clean water. Beatings were so frequent that they became normalized. Guards used collective punishment, beating entire cells for the actions of one person. Threats of sexual violence were constant. Sexualized humiliation, nudity, and threats against detainees and their families were used as tools of control and terror. Cameras monitored every aspect of our lives, even the toilet, stripping us of all privacy and dignity.

During my time in prison, I suffered several forms of sexual violence, including forced nudity, electric shocks near my genital area, the distribution of nude and torture photos on social media (Vkontakte) and messages sent to my friends and family, and constant threats of rape. I also witnessed rapes and sexual violence committed against other inmates.

In a broader contexts, and according to my own and other survivor testimonies I am aware of, Russian authorities use sexual violence as another tool of torture, combining electric shocks and beatings on the genitals with rape itself.

My health deteriorated significantly during detention. I suffer from bronchial asthma, and the overcrowded, mould-filled cell triggered constant suffocation attacks. For months, I lived in fear of dying because I did not have regular access to an inhaler. The physical consequences of captivity remain with me to this day, particularly chronic lung and dental problems.

When I was finally released, I could not return to Ukraine through an official exchange. I remained under restrictions in Donetsk and later returned to Ukraine on my own. Because of this, I initially received no state support. I did not know where to go or who could help me. Obtaining official status as a person deprived of liberty took months, and financial compensation came much later. The compensation I eventually received does not cover even a fraction of my medical needs.

Support from civil society organizations became crucial for my survival and recovery. International and Ukrainian organizations helped me with medical care, housing, food, clothing, and rehabilitation. This assistance allowed me not only to survive but also to regain a sense of dignity and purpose. Over time, I became involved in social activism and began working with organizations supporting survivors of captivity and conflict-related sexual violence.

As an activist and a survivor, I have witnessed how stigma remains a major barrier, especially for male survivors. Many men who experienced torture and sexualized violence remain silent, even with their families, out of fear of rejection and shame. Society often does not recognize that conflict-related sexual violence is used as a method of torture against men as well as women. Recognition, confidentiality, and long-term rehabilitation are essential for us as survivors to rebuild our lives.

Despite everything, I continue to believe in the possibility of healing and change. Captivity took years of my life, but it also reshaped my understanding of my life's value. I hope to see a future where survivors receive recognition, support, and guarantees of non-repetition, and where such crimes are never allowed to happen again.

DESIGNER | MILENA SONNENBERG

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT