

**PROVINCE DE L'EGLISE ANGLICANE DU CONGO
CHURCH IN GOMA, DIOCESE OF BUKAVU**

WORKING TO SUPPORT WOMEN AND GIRLS VICTIMS OF RAPE IN EASTERN DRC

Background information

The Anglican Church is present at the heart of the humanitarian crisis in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Diocese of Bukavu in particular, covers the province of South Kivu and part of the Province of North Kivu. The Diocese was established in 1976 and brings together a community of around 80,000 Christians. There are 88 parishes and the diocese also runs 136 primary and secondary schools and eight Health Centres and two HIV/AIDS test centres.

The situation of women

Soldiers and rebels from different organisations gang-rape women and in several cases women are victims of more than one gang rape. Women are also beaten up, mutilated, impaled and killed. Girls as young as six years old get raped and sexually assaulted. Some of the consequences for women are:

- Infection with HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Unwanted pregnancies from their rapists
- Severe psychological trauma
- Abandonment and rejection by husbands and stigmatisation by relatives or members of the community
- Because of fear and trauma women stop performing ordinary activities such as working the land, fetching water/wood, etc. which in turn has an impact on their economic and social situation and traps them in poverty
- Girls and women IDPs are raped within the camps. If they become pregnant they have to deliver in very bad conditions. The babies suffocate in poor accommodation and are exposed to various diseases such as pneumonia, malaria, cholera, fever etc.



Women and disabilities:

- After being raped multiple times, women suffer several physical consequences that can lead to permanent disabilities: dislocation of hips, fistula, paralysis, among others
- Women who already have a disability cannot flee their villages when the men arrive and get raped and assaulted
- After being beaten and ill treated, women maybe left blind, deaf and having suffered limbs amputations by their rapists



Consequences for the family

- Separation and disintegration of the household
- Children of rape might be abandoned, infected with HIV and/or ill treated

What the Anglican Church does

This particular programme of the Anglican Church in Goma seeks “to become an ecumenical community of women and men affirmed, reconciled, equipped, encouraged and capable of facing the challenges of these times”.

The church provides the following services:

- *Spiritual support*: this component provides a space for the person to open up and speak about what happened (confidential and caring space). It also involves several steps to help the person to overcome shame and stigmatization and to forgive and move on.
- *Medical care*: as soon as a woman arrives, the church staff take her to hospital (providing transport within Goma city and from the rural areas to Goma) to be tested for HIV or other Sexually Transmitted Diseases and for pregnancy. The church provides medical care, including the provision of drugs.
- *Income generation*: the church has set up skills training courses in agriculture, animal keeping, commerce, tailoring, catering, plastic basket production and sugarcane processing. It also has a micro-credit scheme and an adult literacy project. These programmes are attended by women victims of rape who have acquired physical impairments, who are HIV positive, widows and those who have been abandoned by their husbands. Over the past 12th months, 453 women have taken courses and have established 13 different local women’s associations in rural and urban areas.



- *Reconciliation and counselling for couples:* families that are torn apart - because the husbands abandon their wives after knowing they have been raped - are brought together by the church. There is a counselling programme to dissuade men from leaving, to control their anger and to see the situation from another angle, also to accept the child born as a result of the rape. Furthermore, the purpose is to promote forgiveness and to look forward. This programme has resulted in several positive outcomes, including the recent wedding celebration of 30 couples in the church.
- *Relief for IDPs in Kanyaruchinya and Mugunga camps:* mainly populated by women and children, the communities have taken over the church building and the Anglican school as a refuge. The clergy frequently visit the communities to provide food aid and water and spiritual consolation.



There are two ways in which women access the church' services: firstly, the church has an outreach programme in which church workers/priests go to the rural areas to offer their support;

secondly, the women themselves reach out the church looking for help.

Strengths of this experience

- In such a difficult environment, the church is able to provide care and to be a point of reference for the victims. Likewise, it is a stable local institution that has endured the conflict alongside the communities and is committed to working for their wellbeing regardless of ethnicity and religion.
- Persuading husbands to stay with their families and counselling couples, is one of the most successful means of reconciliation in these broken communities.
- The church is able to go beyond the provision of material aid and to support the healing process after these traumatic experiences.

Weakness and challenges of this experience

- The church has very limited resources and lacks sufficient facilities to support the substantial number of women requiring help.
- The church relies on private donations and does not have regular sources of income to support this particular programme. Previous donations from international partners, including an international organisation of women and l'Église Catholique-chrétienne de la Suisse have stopped. It does not have any relation/partnership with UN agencies. The church has looked for help with the international NGOs working in Goma but it has not obtained any positive response. Some UN agencies have expressed their interest in supporting the church work if it were to register as an NGO.
- A further challenge for the work of reconciliation and counselling of couples is that it is only possible if the woman after being raped is not HIV positive, otherwise the possibilities of persuading the husband are very limited.
- This protection initiative is different from the more usual relief programmes which focused on basic services, this might have made it more difficult for the church to access funding. However it provides essential support for a very vulnerable group of IDP and therefore has been included in our appeals.

A testimony from Rev Désiré Mukanirwa Kadorho

A women from the rural area, 80 miles from Goma, who was raped and was about to be abandoned by her husband reached out to the church and through the counselling programme this family was brought back together. The outcome was very positive in that the couple decided to get married in the church. Recently, the women was gang raped again (she lost consciousness and does not know how many have raped her) and became pregnant. She again went to look for help in the church in Goma, she was in a very fragile state (physically and mentally – she was very scared of being HIV positive and being abandoned by her husband) and the priest and his wife took her to the hospital and accommodated her at the Goma Anglican guest house. After the medical examination, she was relieved to find that she has not been infected with HIV but she still had to take medication for other sexual infection diseases. She returned back home. After a couple of days her husband abandoned her alone with their five children. She is on her own and will shortly give birth. What will be the future for this woman?