



Special report: Violence against women

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: THE GLOBAL FIGHTBACK

What women around the world are doing to tackle the most persistent human rights violation in the world today



INTRODUCTION: ONE BILLION RISING FOR ONE BILLION VICTIMS

BY TAMARA GAUSI



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On 14 February 2013, people from around the world will join together to take a stand against violence against women.

But they won't be marching. Nor will they be organising sit-ins. These women, men, girls and boys will be dancing.

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Gender-based violence is the most pervasive and persistent violation of human rights, manifesting itself in everything from domestic abuse and rape to genital-mutilation, honour killings and child trafficking.

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The One Billion Rising global day of action is the latest campaign by award-winning American playwright and gender activist Eve Ensler and V-Day, the international movement she founded to stop violence against women and girls.

Launched in the wake of Republican senator Todd Akin's remarkable comments about 'legitimate rape', the date of One Billion Rising marks the fifteenth anniversary of the V-Day initiative, best known for inspiring the global phenomenon that is The Vagina Monologues.

On 14 February, it is hoped that as many as one billion people will walk out of their homes, their places of work and their

schools in an act of protest of the crimes committed against the female body, and that they will 'strike, dance, rise'.

The number is significant. One in three women will be raped or beaten over the course of her life.

From a global population of over three billion women that equals more than one billion people.

But as Ensler says, one billion women violated is an atrocity. One billion women dancing is a revolution.

This February, there will be thousands of events taking place across the world to commemorate the victims of violence but also to celebrate its survivors.

As well as dance protests, there will be concerts, parties and flash mobs. So far more than 5,000 organisations, from human rights NGOs to trade unions, have pledged their support.

PERVASIVENESS

Gender-based violence is the most pervasive and persistent violation of human rights, manifesting itself in everything from domestic abuse and rape to genital-mutilation, honour killings and child trafficking.

This special Equal Times report on violence against women presents a truly global picture of this phenomenon.

Featuring four stories originally published in November to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, it depicts attacks on trade union activists in Colombia, rape survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the persecution and jailing of female trade unionists in Turkey and violence against domestic workers in the Middle East.

And in the wake of the global outcry following the brutal murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey, the 23-year-old Indian medical student who was gang raped and then thrown off a moving bus in New Delhi, the report also features a fifth story on the threat of violence facing India's female workforce.

While the violence suffered by the women in these stories is at times overwhelming, the tenacity and resistance of these women as individuals and the collective fight-back is hugely inspiring.

We celebrate them and on 14 February, we hope you will too.

For a full list of events and supporters, visit www.onebillionrising.org.

WOMEN, WORK AND THE DELHI GANG-RAPE

BY INDRANI MAZUMDAR

On 16 December 2012, a young woman in Delhi was so brutally gang-raped that her intestines were left trailing out of her body. News of the incident not only evoked widespread shock in India but also across the world.

In Delhi, an enormous outpouring of public anger targeted the police, the administration, India's political leadership and society at large. People blamed this gruesome sexual assault on their indifference, their active failure to provide women with a safe environment and their doublespeak.

The media escaped any such charges of culpability because of its high profile coverage of both the incident and the angry demonstrations that followed, which undoubtedly emboldened the protests. Every day that the victim fought for her life, thousands of protesters urged her on, lauding her courage, clashing with police and demanding the summary punishment of the men accused of the crime.

When she lost that battle for her life on 29 December, a nation mourned. The dramatic silence that fell over the ensuing marches

brought a more contemplative air to the protests.

In the public debate that has erupted around the incident, many issues that have long been raised by generations of activists from the women's movement have suddenly come to the fore.

The Indian government is under pressure to stop dragging its feet – specifically in relation to widening the ambit of sexual assault laws, ensuring their enforcement, increasing punishment for rape and removing the archaic investigative and legal procedures which further violate the victims.

There are those, of course, who reside at the opposite end of the scale. One public figure described the victim “as guilty as her rap-

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ists...she should have called the culprits ‘brothers’ and begged them to stop.”

Other political and religious leaders have used the attention surrounding the incident as a platform to demand that girls be forbidden from wearing skirts in schools.

Such statements are not new and Indian rape victims – like in other parts of the world – often face similar charges of culpability. What is new, however, is that none of these statements are being allowed to go uncontested. There is a growing force of opinion which is hostile to the ideology of restricting women’s mobility and choices in the name of protection against sexual assault.

In a country where caste and community-based feudal restrictions on women’s mobility – including widespread confinement behind the veil – are still to be eradicated, this is a significant social development.

Furthermore, although it was young women and a surprisingly large number of young men who were at the heart of the anti-rape protests, never before had they received such support from their parents and other people from older generations. Not that all support was entirely altruistic. Advertising, cosmetics and fashion companies – which often promote the sexual commodification of women – also joined the chorus demanding respect for women.

Similarly, however high voltage their support and demands for change, it did not prevent the media from interspersing their coverage of the case with advertisements that portrayed women as sex objects.

WOMEN AND THE SERVICE INDUSTRY

Although it was primarily students and not workers who constituted the main force in the protests, they were supported by legions female workers.

The protests undoubtedly reflected the feelings of acute vulnerability and insecurity which India’s female workforce faces, particularly given the increasing number of young women working in the service sector in urban India.

In the wake of liberalisation of the Indian economy, economic growth has been driven primarily by the service industry which currently accounts for 57 per cent of India’s GDP.

Although employment growth in services lags far behind its output growth (official figures show that just 15 per cent of India’s female and 29 per cent of its male workforce

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are employed in the sector), various new service occupations have indeed become available to women.

With the growth of shopping malls for example, an army of sales, office, and even security and sanitation positions have emerged. These sales assistants, hotel and office staff, restaurant workers and even call-centre operatives, however, are working later hours than ever before.

For many of them, working late has become a virtual condition of employment rather than a signifier of freedom. Another prerequisite is youth which also makes for higher levels of vulnerability to sexual assault.

A 2009-2010 study of women workers in Delhi (with a focus on the private sector) provides some fairly representative insights into the links between such vulnerabilities, conditions of work, and women's access to employment.

It showed that 92 per cent of those in the new retail and office based occupations were below the age of 35, while 66 per cent were below 25. Interestingly, a large majority of these workers (73 per cent) reported a dress code – most had to wear modern dress such as shirts, short tops or trousers.

THE ILLUSION OF FREEDOM

A new kind of cultural disciplining of women has thus come into play as part of the opening of these new occupations. It may initially carry the appeal of non-traditional novelty, but it is nevertheless compelled by employer stipulations rather than personal choice.

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The point is that if conditions of work are such as to preclude the majority of Indian women who are in fact married, it means that an increasingly smaller proportion of women are actually able to enter employment.

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© AP Photo/ Saurabh Das



More significantly, insecurities generated by late hours came out clearly in the concern expressed by the same workers that no transportation was provided to them even though they often worked as late as 21.00. Late working hours and the young age of such workers is linked to the third striking feature of women working in these new retail and office jobs – namely that most of them are unmarried.

A more longstanding occupation for India's urban, female middle-class has been teaching, but this follows a slightly different pattern.

The Delhi study showed that while the overwhelming majority (97 per cent) of teachers with formal working rights were married, a similarly overwhelming majority of those with informal working conditions were unmarried.

At the lower end of the socio-economic divide, the majority of women factory workers (76 per cent) in Delhi were married.

Even more among live-out domestic workers (92 per cent) were married, although live-in domestics were mostly unmarried/single.

One may ask why the marital status of female workers should be relevant to the present discussion.

The point is that if conditions of work are such as to preclude the majority of Indian women who are in fact married, it means that an increasingly smaller proportion of women are actually able to enter employment.

This lack of a critical mass only serves to heighten their vulnerability to sexual harassment in workplaces, particularly while commuting.

This is indeed the case as evidenced in the aforementioned study, where almost all women workers across all categories report experiencing sexual abuse, albeit of varying degrees, on the road and particularly on buses and at bus stops. Furthermore, despite the 1997 Vishaka Supreme Court judgement calling for the appointment of sexual harassment complaints committees in workplaces, not one of the surveyed workers reported the existence of any such committee.

The Vishaka judgement had in fact come in response to the gang rape of a social worker in Rajasthan exactly twenty years prior the most recent incident in Delhi.

It indeed had its limitations including a lack of mechanisms that could be applied to informal women workers. Nevertheless, the Delhi study showed that it was ignored even where it could clearly be applied.

Is this not directly linked to the low numbers of women workers? Is this not linked to the percentage of female workers among women aged 15 and above in Delhi dropping from an already low 13.2 per cent in 1993-94 to an even more abysmal 7.3 per cent in 2009-10? Is it not linked to the shocking countrywide reduction in the number of women workers in India by more than 21 million during the half decade preceding 2009-10 evident in national employment statistics? And can the most recent expressions of a general failure to value women be isolated from the workforce becoming even more predominantly male?

The connection is obvious and so in order to increase the safety of women in public spaces, India must address and reverse the reduction of the number of women workers.

The devaluation of women's work is inevitably linked to the devaluation of women in society.

VIOLENCE AGAINST DOMESTIC WORKERS HAS NO BORDERS

BY FARAH ATYYAT AND TAMARA GAUSI

Daivi was only 14 years old when she was attacked by her employer. Her only crime was to admit that she preferred singing to cleaning.

The underaged, migrant maid was so badly beaten that she had to flee her employer's house and seek refuge at the Indonesian embassy in the Jordanian capital of Amman. And to add insult to injury, she was only paid three months' salary for more than a year's work.

Daivi's case is far from unique. In fact there are so many stories of violence against domestic workers, particularly in the Middle East, that it becomes difficult to disassociate one from the other.

However, as the world marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25, the situation facing domestic workers once again comes under the spotlight.

As many as 100 million people around the world work in someone else's home.

The vast majority – 83 per cent according to ILO figures – are women, many of whom are unprotected by labour laws or any form of social security.

Unable to join trade unions, these women are left vulnerable to exploitation, racist and sexist abuse, beatings, food and sleep-deprivation, forced labour, trafficking, rape and even murder.

Many are underpaid or unpaid in circumstances that are little more than modern-day



slavery. Abuse is rarely reported and when it is, it usually goes unpunished.

≡ VICTIMS

Take the case of Alem Dechasa-Desisa, a 33-year-old Ethiopian maid who hanged herself in hospital after being viciously beaten in a Beirut street by a recruitment agent.

The shocking episode, filmed by an anonymous passerby, went viral worldwide, drawing much-needed attention to the desperate situation facing many domestic workers in the country.

A Human Rights Watch report found that at least one domestic worker in Lebanon died from unnatural causes, such as suicide or falling from a multistory building, every week.

Then there was the horrifying case of LP Ariyawathie, a 49-year-old Sri Lankan domestic who had 19 heated nails hammered into her body as a form of punishment by her Saudi employer.

Or Genafe, a Filipino domestic worker in Qatar who ran away from her sponsor after he tried to rape her.

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Indonesian workers shout slogans during a protest against the alleged abuse of 23-year-old Sumiati, an Indonesian domestic worker in Saudi Arabia who is one of many migrant workers who has suffered physical violence at work

She found herself stranded in Qatar without her passport (which her employer kept) or the right to stay in the country (as the validity of a work visa is linked to the employment contract with one's sponsor), leaving her – like so many other domestic workers in similar circumstances – in a precarious situation with very few options.

“ Not only is she unprotected but she is also under aged. Legally, people can only start working in Jordan from the age of 16 – or a minimum of 18 in the case of housemaids – but in reality this is rarely enforced. ”

These examples are just the tip of the iceberg but an ITUC campaign to get governments around the world to impose legislation to protect the rights of domestic workers is underway.

I2 by 12 aims to get at least 12 governments to ratify ILO convention 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers by December 12, 2012.

DOUBLE BIND

But Daivi's case, in particular, highlights the trend of domestic workers who suffer a multitude of violations.

Not only is she unprotected but she is also under aged. Legally, people can only start working in Jordan from the age of 16 – or a minimum of 18 in the case of housemaids – but in reality this is rarely enforced.

In addition, a number of countries such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Kenya have actually banned domestic worker agencies from sending workers to going Jordan because of widespread abuse and labour violations. But that doesn't stop to migrant workers from finding their own way into Jordan.

This situation also applies to a group of maids aged between 14 – 16 who are part of the 300-odd domestic workers currently seeking refuge at the Indonesian Embassy.

These young girls entered Jordan with fake passports which said they were above 20-years-old to conform to the agreements signed between Jordan and Indonesia prohibiting the employment of minors as housemaids.

According to Linda Kalash, director of the Tamkeen Centre for Legal Aid and Human Rights in Amman, recruitment offices in Jordan and Indonesia disregard the ban by issuing tourist visas for domestic workers who then go to a third country like Malaysia or UAE before coming to work in Jordan.

Kalash confirms that this practice is considered as human trafficking by Jordanian law.

She blames the situation on various actors: the recruitment offices in Indonesia who provide forged passports; the border officials who fail to spot the fact that someone who is supposed to be 20 often looks much younger; and also the doctors who issue health certificates for maids upon arrival.

But until laws are implemented and enforced to protect these vulnerable women, their exploitation is likely to continue.

TURKEY'S WOMEN TAKE ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

BY SABINE CLAPPAERT

There are better places in the world to be a woman than Turkey. Five women are killed every day simply because they are women while 42 per cent of Turkish women report having experienced physical or sexual violence. In addition, the number of women murdered between 2002 and 2009 went up by an astonishing 1400 per cent.

According to Turkish human rights activists, these numbers are just the tip of the iceberg. While on the one hand the country has taken important steps to increase its international reputation on women's rights by becoming the first signatory to the Council of Europe Convention Against Domestic Violence Against Women, the reality paints a different picture.

Almost daily, newspapers headline stories of women being murdered, usually violently, in a manner which involves knives or guns.

A story which made global headlines at the beginning of the year provides a chilling example of this violence. On 10 January, 2013, three Kurdish activists – including Sakine Cansiz who help found the Kurdistan Workers Party, an armed group seeking autonomy for Turkey's Kurdish population – were shot dead, execution-style in Paris. A Turkish man of Kurdish extraction who worked as Cansiz's driver has been charged with murder.



©AP Photo/Christophe Ena

A man pays his respects next to a portrait of Sakine Cansiz inside the Kurdish cultural centre in Paris where she and three other female Kurdish activists were murdered in January

Most often, the women are victims of so-called ‘honour killings’ committed by an estranged husband or family member. In one horrific case last year, a 20-year-old mother and her baby were strangled. The perpetrators? Her brother and father.

Liz Amado, of Turkish NGO Women for Women’s Human Rights explains: “It’s true that on the one hand we now have much better reporting and documentation of violence against women. On the other hand, we do see a significant increase in violence against women, which can in part be attributed to the culture of violence that is promoted in political and social spheres all over the world. Added stresses such as rising social-political tensions, the financial crisis and poverty are also reflected in this increase in violence against women.”

== KESK

But the situation in Turkey is even worse for those women that dare to speak out and demand social and gender equality. For these women, the road leads straight to prison via vague charges, prolonged pre-trial incarceration and severe punishments. Some activists are even facing up to 45 years in jail.

In February, 15 female members of KESK – Turkey’s independent trade union confederation – were taken into custody for “illegal activities”, bringing the total number of KESK members arrested this year to 75. Their offenses have included joining and organising demonstrations, strike actions and “crimes of propaganda” which included calling a TV channel and writing an article for a Kurdish TV channel. The first hearing of the trial against women of KESK took place on 4 October where six of the detained women were released and three were sent back to the prison. They were finally released on 13 December.

On closer inspection, the complexity of the problems that swirl around the KESK arrests becomes clear: KESK has a strong Kurdish member base – the country’s largest ethnic minority that constitutes a fifth of Turkey’s population and with which the Turkish government struggles to maintain peaceful ties, even after its 2009 pledge to launch a “dem-

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ocratic opening” to address the Kurdish problem in Turkey and respect the rights of all minority groups in its society.

Apart from the ethnic tensions which cloud the drive for gender equality, serious questions also remain over the commitment of the Islamic-rooted government to gender equality. While Turkey has full equality on paper and proudly announces that it “has introduced the most progressive legal reforms in Europe to improve women’s rights at home, in school, in the workplace”, the reality remains discouragingly bleak.

▬ “AMBIVALENT AT BEST”

In the 2011 Global Gender Gap Report Turkey ranks 122 out of 135 countries. A gender-gap in education remains, the country has the lowest levels of female employment among OECD countries and the representation of women in decision-making bodies is also low. According to recent research, 39 per cent of the women in Turkey are victims of physical violence and 15 per cent are victims of sexual violence. Yet a country that has such high levels of inter-gender violence and that counts a 1400 per cent increase in the number of femicides has only 26 shelters for 72 provinces.

“The government’s approach to gender equality is ambivalent at best,” adds Amado.

“We clearly need stronger political will to improve the situation for women. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s announcement that the ‘Ministry for Women and Family’ will be replaced by a

According to recent research, 39 per cent of the women in Turkey are victims of physical violence and 15 per cent are victims of sexual violence. Yet a country that has such high levels of inter-gender violence and that counts a 1400 per cent increase in the number of femicides has only 26 shelters for 72 provinces.

‘Ministry of Family and Social Policies’, and his conservative stance earlier this year on abortion, reflect that ambivalence. And while the legal framework for gender equality has improved over the past decade, implementation remains problematic.”

But for many activists, including Amado’s Women for Women’s Human Rights and the KESK women, a hostile political environment and the threat of imprisonment are no reason to keep silent in the face of injustice. And while only eight per cent of Turkish women who experienced violence dared to request help from official bodies, Amado and other Turkish human rights activists continue to raise their voice for freedom of expression and other social rights in Turkey.

THE FACE OF ANTI-UNION VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

BY SHIRLEY NUÑOZ

Expressions of violence in Colombia are manifold.

As well as a long history of political violence, there is a long-running conflict between government forces, insurgents and paramilitaries.

On a societal level, official figures indicate that women have been most affected by the civil conflict which has plagued the country for half a century and generated one of the worst internal refugee crisis in the world.

Governmental agency Acción Social has registered 1.9 million female refugees in the country, of which, 30 per cent have abandoned their homes due to domestic violence.

In addition, social activists and, particularly, labour leaders are some of the most targeted victims.

One of the realities that characterises Colombia is the high level of anti-union violence. The figures speak for themselves: 2,932 murders registered since 1986, 5,915 death threats and 298 attempted murders.

Women are disproportionately affected.

According to data from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), 274 women trade unionists were killed between 1986 and 2011.

Behind the statistics are people like trade unionist María Victoria Jiménez, a bacteriologist at the Santa Fe de Antioquia hospital and chair of the health workers' union ANTHOC in her municipality.

≡ “BRUTAL ATTACK”

In 2009, when María Victoria returned from holidays, she sensed that something strange was brewing.

On two occasions, she had seen two men on a motorbike prowling around on the route she used to go to work.

On the night of 24 September, as she reached her home, she noticed that the light was out in the doorway to her house.

When she put the key in the door, she felt a hand over her mouth and the body of a man holding her from behind and hitting her all over.

The lights instantly came on in the house.

Desperately struggling to get away, María Victoria fell to the ground and saw that she was in fact being attacked by two men.

©Photo/Jairo Ruiz



María Victoria Jiménez was stabbed seven times and had her nose destroyed because of her work as a trade unionist

She tried to raise her head to see who they were but received a final blow to the face before she could get a look at them.

Frightened by the light and the cries of her mother, the two men fled leaving her lying on the floor.

She was rushed into hospital with seven knife wounds and her nose destroyed by the final blow delivered when she was on the ground.

She had to undergo 12 operations, including many to reconstruct her nose.

▬ "TRADE UNIONS"

The assault suffered by María Victoria was motivated by her role as a trade union leader.

Prior to the attack, she had denounced an appointment that had been made without following the proper merit-based selection procedure.

At the same time, she had noticed that a number of thefts were being committed by local contractors, and set herself the task of investigating them.

On recovering from the attack, she returned to work, sharing the same space with the person she suspected had been involved in the attack.

The situation then took an unexpected turn. Her family started receiving relentless intimidating phone calls.

One of Maria's cousins came up with the idea of offering money to the man who was threatening them, so that he would leave them in peace.

After that, everything changed. The man not only stopped threatening her family but also, in exchange for money, sent them evidence and the names of the people behind the attack.

María Victoria handed this evidence over to the Public Prosecutions Office and the investigator appointed to the case managed to identify the six people implicated in the attempted murder, but very little progress was nonetheless made in resolving the case.

She is convinced that the gender factor has played a significant role, both with regard to the pressure placed by the hospital administration and the Public Prosecutor's assertion that it was a crime of passion.

"Things would have been different if it had been a man in my situation," she concludes.

The investigation into her case was reopened a few weeks ago, but the trade unionist suspects that the crime is going to go unpunished.

She has been battling with new threats and acts of intimidation against herself and her family over recent months.

But every incident, every threat, every moment of anguish, rather than making her give in, have strengthened her resolve.

“ She is convinced that the gender factor has played a significant role, both with regard to the pressure placed by the hospital administration and the Public Prosecutor's assertion that it was a crime of passion. ”

Not only has she returned to Santa Fe de Antioquia, but she has also resumed her role as the branch chair of the union.

She will not be forced into silence or stop fighting alongside her colleagues to defend their rights. On the contrary: she is determined to make her voice heard over those that want to silence her.

UPSURGE IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

BY ANNE-MARIE IMPE

Kanyarucinya. October 2012. In this little village approximately ten kilometres north of Goma and about 17 kilometres from the front line, approximately 60,000 people have found temporary refuge.

This is history repeating itself in dramatic fashion: the majority of these families had already fled their homes in 2008 when the Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) a Tutsi militia had threatened to attack Goma, the capital of the North Kivu province.

© Photo/Anne-Marie Impe



Following a peace agreement signed with the Kinshasa government, the majority of the members of the CNDP were integrated into the Congolese army in 2009.

It is these same soldiers that mutinied between April and May 2012, leaving the army to set up the M23.

According to UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, approximately 390,000 new internally-displaced people have fled the fighting which has been on-going for six months between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) and the M23 mutineers, following in the footsteps of the families at Kanyarucinya, taking shelter under makeshift shelters offering little protection from the rain in the middle of the rainy season.

A further 60,000 people have taken refuge in Rwanda and Uganda.

In September 2011, I met Angélique Kipulu Katani, gender coordinator and vice president of the Congo Trade Union Confederation (CSC) in Kinshasa.

She explained to me that for almost twenty years (more accurately since the 1994 genocide in Rwanda), the east of Congo has never known peace, only short periods of deceptive calm. And that in areas where there is ongoing conflict between armed men, women are of course the first victims.

“The violence is constantly being repeated. Every time women go to the fields, they are prey to their tormentors.

“Rape is carried out on girls and women of all ages, from babies to women of 80 years old and more.

"It is committed by the many armed groups (Interahamwe, Mai-Mai, etc), present in the East, and by our army. These men go into a village, rape the women, and sometimes kidnap them and take them to the forest as their prisoners."

EXPLOSIVE INSECURITY

In South Kivu, the situation is also very tense. On 31 October, the city of Bukavu staged a protest against the upsurge in killings.

Organised by the civil society bureau, the strike was widely supported despite messages from the authorities asking people not to support it.

Just one week before, on 25 October, the renowned doctor Denis Mukwege narrowly escaped an assassination attempt.

This world-famous obstetrician/gynaecologist at the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu has worked tirelessly for years with women victims of gender-based violence.

In 12 years, he has treated over 30,000 women, suffering with what are often particularly serious genital lesions.

When he talks about his work, the stories are unbearable.

"One day," he recalls, "the International Committee of the Red Cross brought a young girl aged 18 or 19 to me. She had been raped.

"The barrel of a gun had been placed in her vagina and shot. Her entire urogenital system was in shreds.

"I tried to put the pieces back together as best I could. It took six operations."

Following the attempted assassination of Dr Mukwege, the gynaecologist and his family have taken refuge in Belgium.

The perpetrators of the attack remain at large and the attack remains unexplained.

This is a terrible loss for all the women victims of sexual violence.

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Rape is carried out on girls and women of all ages, from babies to women of 80 years old and more.

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© Photo/Anne-Marie Impe



Thanks to the support of one of many NGOs looking after the female victims of sexual violence in eastern Congo, Micheline now runs her own restaurant

© AP Photo/Peter Mueller



“We can end all violence against women.”

“If this country is to really develop, the place of the woman, her role, her dignity, must be recognised.”

STOP THE VIOLENCE. NOW!

The 25 November is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Designated as such by the UN General Assembly in 1999, each year it is an opportunity for trade unions, feminist organisations and all those who would like to promote gender equality to mobilise to curb sexual violence.

In the case of Congo, we must firstly as a matter of urgency organise awareness-generating campaigns for the general public.

RAPE: A WEAPON OF WAR

According to him, rape is clearly being used as a weapon of war in eastern Congo to terrorise the population, deconstruct society and in this way to favour the illegal exploitation of the country's tremendous riches.

According to Colette Braeckman, a Belgian journalist for *Le Soir* and *Le Monde diplomatique* who has written a book on the subject, Dr Mukwege even suspects that rape is part of a plan to depopulate Kivu and to replace the original inhabitants with new ones.

In additions to conflict-related violence, women are also victims of abuse in the work place: sexual harassment, pregnant women being fired, discrimination and inhumane working conditions.

This is without counting domestic violence. According to Jeanine Gabrielle Ngungu, a gender activist and national coordinator of the Common Change DRC programme:

“In the DRC, statistics show that two out of three women suffer on a daily basis.”

“If this country is to really develop, the place of the woman, her role, her dignity, must be recognised.”

We must then call upon the international community to exert real pressure on Rwanda and Uganda so that these countries stop supporting the M23 – support which was uncovered by a carefully-researched United Nations report.

Finally, we must call on the government of the DRC to take decisive measures to restore peace in the east of the country, to prosecute the perpetrators of sexual violence and in this way to put an end to impunity. And we must act now!