

54th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

WILPF /RDC parallel side event. 10th March. CCUN.



Theme: The political implication of the Congolese woman for change and in the promotion of good governance in Democratic Republic of Congo.

Sub-Theme: "The problematic of Violence against Women: A Major challenge in the national reconstruction process and in the promotion of good governance in RD Congo".

By Jeanine Gabrielle NGUNGU

Distinguished guest,

Dear invited sisters, activists of the women's rights;

Members of the panel.

My gratitude goes to all those who have willingly made efforts for the materialization of this side event during this international evaluation of Beijing +15. We particularly thank WILPF International, the Global Fund for Women and the UK section of WILPF, as well all the individuals whose efforts have made this panel today possible.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), my country, has many varieties of cultural wealth. But embedded within these cultures are patriarchal

customs that are used to justify inequalities and discrimination against women. Notably, the inferior status conferred upon women has the effect of condoning violence against them.

For 16 years, following wars of aggression and armed conflicts that have occurred in country, Congolese women have endured a new form of violence, which is sexual violence, used as a tool of war in order to terrorize local populations and displaced them from their lands. The use of rape and other sexual violence is a war within a conflict consequences such as the destruction of human capital, maternal mortality, and impoverishment of local community. Women were raped, abused and traumatized, thus losing self esteem and confidence as well as their dignity. Yet again, women have always had the courage and strength to work as well as to mobilize for peace. They say: “Peace for development, peace for the promotion of their rights and peace for social justice”.

The struggle for social change in DR Congo must prioritize the ending of gender-based inequalities and the promotion of social justice in order to create a favorable environment for participation of women and men in the process of sustainable development, as well as for the implementation of a rule of Law. Collected data are eloquent and reveal a correlation between Violence Against Women and the under-development of local communities.

In 1999, an investigation conducted by the General Secretariat to the Ministry of Gender, in collaboration with UNICEF, on the customary laws and on the succession rights of women, established 12 types of domestic violence experienced by Congolese women that affect, in one way or another, the promotion of women’s rights and their full empowerment.

Recently, a Health and Demographic investigation (EDS, 2007) conducted by the DRC Ministry of Planning, with the support of a consortium of funders, shows the extent to which women of child-bearing age experience domestic violence; they report the following:

-Physical Violence: all categories of women are affected; nearly 64% of women have been harmed since the age of 15 years; that is, 2 women out of 3 during 2007. Furthermore, more than 1 of every 2 women, or 59%, experienced physical violence during pregnancy.

-Sexual violence: 1 woman out of 10 aged 18 – 49 years describes her first sexual experience as having been coerced; 16% stated they had had sexual relations against their will.

-conjugal violence: this is the most frequent form of domestic violence in the DRC. 71% of women, or 2 women out of 3, were confronted with acts of emotional, physical or sexual violence within their own households. Of those, 57% were victims of physical violence, 35% were subjected to sexual violence, 64% experienced both sexual and physical violence; and 43% described emotional violence only.

In a 2009 research study designed to address this problem, participants from 4 DRC provinces joined the “We can” Campaign, and since, have also undertaken an investigation on attitudes, practices and behaviors on gender violence. Collected data include the following:

- 81% of those surveyed were aware of Violence Against Women in the community. Sexual violence was the most quoted (59%), followed by blows and injuries (45%). The majority of surveyed persons were sensitive (80%) to these forms of violence but only 35% thought that it was necessary to stop them.

-Results indicated that on the physical and psychological levels, nearly half of the women (47%) were frequently humiliated, 40% were often beaten and 32% were publicly insulted.

Regarding conjugal sexual violence, more than half of women (52%) were frequently forced to have sexual relations against their will and about 1/5 (19%) were forced to have other types of sexual relations.

With regards to economic violence, it was reported that 1/4 of men (husbands or partners) frequently refused to participate in the household loads (28%), and 1/5 confiscated financial resources or agricultural production of women. Furthermore, (23%) of women asserted they were forbidden to exercise income generating activities.

In most cases, women relinquished, tolerated and or were frustrated by this violence. The society remains powerless and inactive on Violence Against Women even though it was found that the majority of the population is aware of the phenomenon.

These statistics show how vulnerable women are, and they illustrate the numerous abuses committed by men against women because of the dominant position confers to men by the society and the inferior status of women.

In order to resolve this state of things, several initiatives are taken in on the political level as well in operational actions, however results are weak. Women's participation in the state of the nation remains precarious and their representation in all decision- making levels is insufficient.

Therefore it is wise that we keep in mind that it is about woman's power, her autonomy, empowerment or emancipation. However, the principal solution remains the education for all, women and men, for change in the practices and mentalities within local communities.

This is the approach implemented by the "We Can" Campaign to end all forms of violence against women. This Campaign implies the participation of individuals of a community, a social and a social diagnosis as well as individual and collective change in order to address together social acceptance of violence against women. This option is strategic as it will illuminate and orient interventions accordingly with regards women's rights or even better with regard to the problematic of violence against women which about human security of women and an obstacle to development.

As it has been addressed since the beginning of this presentation, violence against women is not temporal but more structural. And this is why it must be classified in the political context and not only the humanitarian.

Currently, in the DRC, there is an avalanche of well intentioned organisations that are coming to assist and relieve abused women. It is necessary to indicate that all these programs mobilize important funds but unfortunately the results are as tiny, as the impact is insignificant. While addressing the consequences, it is important to put in place appropriate mechanisms to act on the deep causes and to propose appropriate steps for durable solutions.

To illustrate this matter, according to a consultant of MONUC (The UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC), who is in charge of elaborating the strategy of the UN in its fight against sexual gender based violence in the DRC, 250 millions of dollars were mobilized and used before March 2009.

I am ending this presentation, therefore, with a view about the power of women: statistics demonstrate a weakness. We have to question: “how could women gain power i.e: reach the summit, if awareness raising is not done at the grassroots? Awareness raising is not only a civic education but much more, a collective conscientiousness in order to link political power and promotion of rights and a sense of the community’s destiny. This consciousness will enable women to localize their interests and to establish a social contract with those (women) who will be in power. It is therefore more likely that conscientious women who will be in power, that will carrying this question (addressing the situation of women) in political institutions. A developing environment by women, favors more and more

the enjoyment of their rights and in contrary, an environment without development maintain women in a situation of human insecurity.

I take for example, the province of the Maniema, one of the DRC provinces where women are the most subjected to various forms of violence, (with a very low rate of instruction of the girl child and women, acute form domestic violence, economic violence and degrading traditions), this province is the one that presents the worst infrastructures problems with the least basic social services in the DRC.

Here why, all steps taken to achieve sustainable development of the DRC must take into account the problematic of women's rights as well as the elimination of all forms of violence against women as a battle horse.

I thank you for your attention

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