



November 7, 2008

**Via Email and Lettermail**

The Right Honourable Stephen J. Harper  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A2

Dear Right Honourable Prime Minister Harper,

**Re: Canadian role in helping to end conflict-driven rape in eastern D.R.C.**

As you are aware, this past week the 10-year long civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.) has escalated outside the city of Goma in the eastern part of the country. With an estimated 20,000 displaced persons flooding into the area, the situation is a tinderbox of violence fueled by hunger. Since August, when the fighting began to escalate, mass rapes have increased, by some estimates to 40 per day.

Reports from HEAL Africa, one of the few humanitarian NGOs still operating in Goma that helps rape survivors, stress the urgent need for UN troops to intervene to protect civilians from violence, including sexual violence. Protection is also needed to help guard humanitarian and local hospitals. With hunger and looting on the rise, they are being targeted. Earlier this year, one of our colleagues visited HEAL Africa's hospital in Goma, and witnessed the aftermath of what these women and children have survived – mutilations, rape using weapons such as guns, and other torture. And yet, these women and children are all survivors, with a resilience and inner strength that is truly inspirational. After joining the international community's proclamations that "never again" would the world allow the horrors such as were seen in the Rwandan genocide, we cannot stand by and allow these atrocities to continue.

On behalf of the Canadian Treatment Action Council, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Dignitas International, Amnesty International Canada, the Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development and the Stephen Lewis Foundation, we urge you to use all means at your disposal to ensure Congolese, UN and other key parties in and outside the D.R.C. act urgently to prevent and respond to violence against civilians and the brutal rapes of women and children in the embattled area around Goma, and to protect the citizens of North Kivu, where there are about one million internally displaced people.

All of our organizations are following current events in eastern D.R.C. closely and are regularly in touch with partners and contacts on the ground. Based on these contacts and partners, at this time we see the following to be priority areas for Canadian action:

- Demonstrate via concrete action and public statements Canada's commitment to the recent United Nations (UN) **Security Council Resolution 1820** on women, peace and security, which demands the "immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians" and affirming that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide".
- Press UN Security Council members to deploy **more UN peacekeepers to support the existing force** of the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) to protect civilians from attack – including gang rapes of women by soldiers that have been reported in Goma. MONUC must **intervene to stop crimes of rape**. Right now, peacekeeping bodies are making what relief workers brand a 'half-hearted' and inadequate response to violence. MONUC troops must be actively deployed to protect civilians. This action by MONUC and the international community would directly support Security Council Resolution 1820 and international law, which recognize these war rapes as 'humanitarian crimes.' In addition, articles 8 and 18 of the Security Council Resolution 1794 passed when MONUC's mandate was renewed specifically required that MONUC protect civilians from physical and sexual violence.
- Press UN Security Council members **to ensure humanitarian access** and to deploy MONUC peacekeepers **to protect displaced civilians**.
- Ensure all international representatives have the **mandate, authority and resources** to take clear actions to help broker a durable peace in North Kivu, and to demand that key warring actors support Security Council Resolution 1820 **by stopping crimes of rape and atrocities against civilians**, and instead, actively protect civilians from violence, including sexual violence and rape.
- Work to ensure that the **World Food Programme increase its distribution of emergency food assistance** in Goma and the region. The lack of food is causing fierce competition for available resources, and threatens the relationship of communities being forced together in close proximity. **Hunger is driving violence**.
- Create **Sexual Violence Rapid Response Units** within MONUC who can reach women who have experienced rape and sexual violence amidst fighting to prevent and respond to rapes and to assist rape survivors in gaining safe access to emergency medical and counseling services from HEAL Africa and other frontline NGOs equipped to assist.
- Provide full support to MONUC's Senior Adviser/Coordinator on Sexual Violence and to relevant UN entities operating in D.R.C., to ensure a comprehensive mission-wide strategy is developed that effectively strengthens UN prevention, protection and response to sexual violence, in line with Security Council resolutions 1794 (2007) and 1820 (2008).
- Support a coordinated **local emergency plan to respond to the current increase of sexual violence** that includes:
  - units protected by MONUC forces who can reach women who have experienced rape and sexual violence amidst fighting and/or proactive MONUC forces with the capacity to protect civilians and prevent or respond to sexual violence;
  - a central mobile telephone number for reporting sexual violence;

- referring rape survivors to relief workers working with the few international NGOs active around Goma (e.g., MSF Belgium, IMC, Norwegian Church AID) and at IDP centers in North Kivu who have mobile and fixed medical teams to assist rape survivors;
  - taking similar steps to support, and as necessary, to protect Panzi Hospital in South Kivu. Panzi has also been targeted by violence and the medical team at Panzi in Bukavu coordinates responses and care for survivors of sexual violence, including rape survivors who come from North Kivu;
  - supporting and equipping relief teams to provide **protection and fuel, water and food to displaced persons in IDP camps in North Kivu, and to protect civilians, including civilians vulnerable to sexual violence in the camps**. NGOs with experience working on the issue of gender-based violence (GBV) must engage community members to assist with post-rape counseling. Any responsible group or individuals, such as NGOs, MONUC or UN agencies operating the camps, must make medical and psychosocial referrals for rape survivors, in particular in order to provide rape survivors with post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV within 72 hours of possible exposure; and
  - recruiting and training local men and women from existing NGOs in Goma that have programs and trained counselors to work in the IDP camps, and referring survivors to these local NGOs for supportive services and shelter. Local NGOs are receiving survivors in their homes and villages and need to be directly linked to arriving emergency medical providers and camp managers.
- **The international summit on the crisis in eastern DRC commencing 7 November 2008 in Nairobi must address with urgency the need to stop violence against civilians, and particularly sexual violence.**

Your attention to this urgent crisis is deeply appreciated. We know and trust that you will act to ensure the safety of men, women and children in the D.R.C., and we look forward to hearing from you about the actions that Canada will take on their behalf.

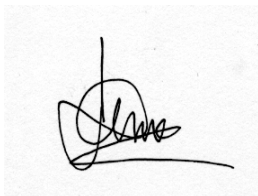
Sincerely,



Louise Binder  
Chair, Canadian Treatment Action Council




Richard Elliott  
Executive Director, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network



James Fraser  
Executive Director, Dignitas International



Michael O'Connor  
Executive Director, Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development



Ilana Landsberg-Lewis  
Executive Director, Stephen Lewis Foundation



Alex Neve  
Secretary-General, Amnesty International Canada (English-Speaking)