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VIOLENCE  
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WOMEN**



# Democratic Republic of Congo

## Mass rape: Time for remedies

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**SUMMARY**

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In the course of the armed conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), tens of thousands of women and girls have been victims of systematic rape and sexual assault committed by combatant forces. Women and girls have been attacked in their homes, in the fields or as they go about their daily activities. Many have been raped more than once or have suffered gang rapes. In many cases, women and young girls have been taken as sex slaves by combatants. Rape of men and boys has also taken place. Rape has often been preceded or followed by the deliberate wounding, torture or killing of the victim. They have been committed in public and in front of family members, including children. Some women have been raped next to the corpses of family members.

The civilian population of eastern DRC has been the victim of war crimes and grave human rights violations on a daily basis. They have seen combatants from around 20 armed factions fighting for control of the land and its resources. In a context of the collapse of state authority in the east, national and international laws are no longer observed and all the armed factions have perpetrated and continue to perpetrate sexual violence with impunity. Rape has been used deliberately and strategically to attack the fundamental values of the community, to terrorize and humiliate those suspected of supporting an enemy group and to impose the supremacy of one group over another.

Survivors' rights are further violated in the aftermath of the rape, deepening their suffering immeasurably. Most women suffering injuries or illnesses caused by rape – some of them life-threatening – are denied the medical care they need. Because of prejudice, many women are abandoned by their husbands and excluded by their communities, condemning them and their children to extreme poverty. Because of an incapacitated judicial system, there is no justice or redress for the crimes they have endured. Women live in fear of further attacks or reprisals if they speak out against the perpetrators.

This report focuses particularly on one of the rape survivors' most pressing needs: access to adequate medical care. In the DRC, a country where millions of civilians are suffering and dying as a result of years of conflict, the health care infrastructure, already severely under-resourced, has broken down completely in many areas and is unable to offer even the most basic treatment. Across eastern DRC, there is a clear lack of trained doctors, including nurses, gynaecologists and other medical personnel. The system of charging for treatment also puts health care beyond the means of most Congolese.

A new power-sharing government took office in the DRC in July 2003, with considerable international political and financial support. However, the government has so far made little effort to address the suffering of a civilian population traumatized and debilitated by years of warfare, or to advance their human, social and economic rights. The transitional government and international community cannot quickly and comprehensively remedy the immense destruction wrought on the health infrastructure in the east since 1998, but significant progress in this longer-term process can and should be begun.

Amnesty International (AI) is calling on the DRC government and the international community to implement key measures to facilitate access to medical to rape survivors and ensure that the rehabilitation of the DRC national health care system becomes a priority. In particular, AI urges the DRC government and international donor community to establish an emergency programme for the medical and psychological care of survivors. AI is also recommending that an expert mission be formed as quickly as possible to evaluate the priority needs of the DRC's health care system. The findings of this assessment mission should form the basis of a joint national and international plan, with dedicated international donor assistance, for the reconstruction of the DRC's health system.

Action is also needed to address the other needs of rape survivors. The DRC government must take its responsibility to prevent, punish and eradicate sexual violence. A coordinated national and international effort to improve security in the east is needed, including by reinforcing the UN peacekeeping presence in the east and deploying its units to protect women in areas where they are most vulnerable to attack, and by unblocking the stalled national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. Only by disarming and dispersing the combatant groups, and by introducing integrated, properly trained and accountable government army and police forces, can the Congolese hope to see a significant reduction in the scale of human rights abuses in the east.

The government must also take measures to prevent survivors from being subjected to social and economical exclusion, and facilitate their search for justice. The authorities should take action to bring alleged perpetrators to justice. Local non-governmental organizations caring for survivors of sexual violence must be supported and protected in their work, and their experience and dedication should be built on in developing national strategies to the rape crisis.

Amnesty International urges the transitional government to undertake these obligations urgently, and to use all available resources, including those provided through international cooperation and assistance. It is also particularly incumbent on donor countries and others in a position to assist the transitional government, to offer sufficient assistance to allow the realisation of at least the minimum essential levels of health care, and the right to health of particularly vulnerable individuals such as rape survivors.

This report summarizes a 67-page document (32,139 words), : Democratic Republic of Congo: Mass rape – Time for remedies (AI Index: AFR 62/018/2004 issued by Amnesty International in October 2004 Anyone wishing further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document. An extensive range of our materials on this and other subjects is available at <http://www.amnesty.org> and Amnesty International news releases can be received by email: [www.amnesty.org/email/email\\_updates.html](http://www.amnesty.org/email/email_updates.html)