

## Rape in the DR Congo: Canada, where are you?

October 1, 2009

Tanja Bergen, Executive Director of the Africa Canada Accountability Coalition (ACAC), a student led initiative at the Liu Institute for Global Issues, spoke to the Canada Senate Committee for Human Rights on September 14, 2009. An excerpt of her speech is included here.

“Greetings Chairman and Honourable senators,

I am here representing a research-based advocacy organization, the Africa Canada Accountability Coalition (ACAC). This past summer we worked with Dr. Erin Baines at the Liu Institute for Global Issues at the University of British Columbia to produce a report titled 'The Worst Place in the World to be a Woman': Canada's Role to Stop Rape in the Dem. Rep. Congo (DRC). I believe it has been shared with you. This report examines Canada's current and historic involvement in the DRC and puts forth a series of Canadian-specific recommendations to address mass rape in the eastern region of this country, which has been called the worst place in the world to be a woman and the rape capital of the world. Today I will premise my remarks on the report's recommendations to discuss why and how Canada should and can make the DRC its pilot country to fully implement its 1325 commitments.

A whole of government approach is needed for Canada to fulfil its commitments to UNSCR 1325 in the DRC. This is evident because Canada has played major roles in the DRC from peacekeeping to diplomacy, aid and investment since Congolese independence in the 1960s. Though these involvements impacted Congolese women and girls both positively and negatively, they collectively built a foundation of Canadian experience and knowledge that now enables Canada to utilize diverse mechanisms, including resolution 1325, to address mass rape and other forms of sexual and gender based violence in the DRC.

There are many strategies that Canada can employ to implement resolution 1325 and help stop rape and other forms of sexual and gender based violence in the DRC. Invest Locally. Support the DRC's vibrant grassroots that is working to promote women's rights and halt the conflict's brutal impact on women. Promote Transparency to ensure that Canadian investment does not contribute to the conflict's political economy that perpetuates gender violence. Finally, work from within our borders and on the international stage to End Impunity for war criminals, some of which live within our own borders. We must use all available resources to denounce mass rape and help bring an end to the social structures that encourage impunity which kills women in the DRC.

Now is the time to implement these strategies because there are several unique opportunities that Canada must capitalize on in the DRC.

Canada harbours alleged war criminals from Rwanda and the DRC. Allowing these people to walk our streets with impunity denies opportunities for justice to Congolese people, particularly women and girls, that have been brutalized. This literally kills women as it prevents them from disclosing their rape status and seeking medical care and psychosocial support. Canada must work from within its borders and through institutions like the International Criminal court to end impunity. This will save women's lives and also fulfil our responsibility under UNSCR 1325 to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against



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humanity and war crimes including those relating to sexual violence against women and girls.

As you are aware Canada is currently campaigning for a spot on the UN Security Council for a two year-term starting in 2011. With support from the Canadian Rights & Democracy Organization, Congolese women's groups have recently released a statement that calls for a UNSC-led international commission to investigate crimes of sexual violence committed in the Kivus since the official end of hostilities in the second Congo war on July 1, 2002. By addressing the demands of Congolese women, Canada would fulfil the resolution 1325 commitment that calls for Security Council missions to take into account gender considerations and the rights of women through consultation with local and international women's groups.

In 2011 the DRC will be holding national elections. Currently Congolese women account for no more than a meagre 7% of elected officials. Under resolution 1325 UN member states are called to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions. Canada provided significant political and financial resources for the 2006 election and should do so again in 2011. In addition to resolution 1325, Canada can leverage recent changes to the Congolese constitution that affirm women's entitlement to equitable representation in national provincial and local institutions to promote women's participation in the democratic process. Finally, there are many reputable grassroots and international organizations that are working to engender the democratic process in the DRC that could greatly benefit from Canadian support.

Implementing these strategies will require the goodwill of the Congolese government. Unfortunately, over the last five years, Canadian policy in the DRC has eroded Canada's credibility to engage in Congolese peace-building initiatives. Additionally, Canada has little political representation in many of the countries in the Great Lakes Region that border the DRC: Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda and 13 other countries are all represented by the Canadian High Commission in Kenya. Conflict in the DRC, especially in the east, is intertwined with conflicts in the Great Lakes Region. Therefore, Canada must renew the mandate of the Canadian ambassador to the Great Lakes Region to re-establish the political presence needed to facilitate contributions to peace-building processes.

In conclusion, Canada should be compelled to engage with the Congo because of our history. We have participated in almost every peace process since the 1999 cease-fire, sent peacekeepers since the 1960s and are the largest non-African investor in the Congolese mining industry which is known to fuel conflict. Moreover, Canadians should be compelled to support Congolese women and civil society that are doing a heroic job of promoting peace and fighting for their rights despite living in a region where every 36 minutes an atrocity occurs such as one of the following described by Stephen Lewis: "the raping of three-month-old infants and eighty-year-old women, the dispatching of militias who have HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases to rape entire villages, women being held as sex slaves for weeks, months and years and women being forced to eat murdered babies." For these reasons the DRC is a morally and practically the logical pilot country for Canada to make a concerted effort to fully implement its commitments to resolution 1325.

Thank you for your time and I am looking forward to answering your questions."

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### **In the Media**

<http://pauldewar.ca/en/media/articles/154-congo-is-calling-will-canada-answer.html>,  
The Embassy Magazine

## About the Africa Canada Accountability Coalition

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This project is a product of a partnership between the Africa Canada Accountability Coalition [ACAC] and the Liu Institute for Global Issues at the University of British Columbia. With a focus on sexual and gender-based violence, particularly mass rape, in the eastern DRC, the NO MORE RAPE campaign is ACAC's academic project, focused on gender security. The project is also an experiment in combining sound academic research with determined advocacy and activism.

For more information, please visit their website: [www.acacdrcongo.org](http://www.acacdrcongo.org)

## Background: About the Liu Institute for Global Issues

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Named after Dr. Jieh Jow Liou, the Liu Institute conducts and facilitates research on global issues, mobilizing knowledge into solutions and policy. One of sixteen research units in the College for Interdisciplinary Studies (CFIS), the Institute takes an interdisciplinary problem-solving approach to explore new ideas and ways of learning to catalyze innovative thinking and positive societal change. Its current focus is on advancing sustainability, security, and social justice: understood as moving toward economic, social, and environmental interactions that promote the well-being of people in ways that are just, equitable, and sustainable.

Founded in 1998 by Professor Ivan Head and opened in 2000, the Institute acts as a hub for global research and emerging issues at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

A hallmark of the Institute is to provide innovative learning and research opportunities for UBC graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, faculty, and community members that help to bridge the gap between academics and practitioners.

## For more information, please contact:

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