



Congo (DRC) Take action NOW!

Women in Black, London, are holding this vigil to draw attention to the effects on women of the violent conflicts in the DRC (Congo) - "The world's most dangerous place for women."

"Armed conflict is one of the most prevalent causes of poverty and a major obstacle to sustainable development."
Saferworld

"These complex African wars: the economic systems have collapsed Education has broken down ...Guns are readily available Respect for women and community has been eroded by the terror practices of the warlords."
Victoria Brittain

"The proliferation of small arms is very destabilising – it erodes negotiated peace settlements, hampers conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction and undermines the basis for sustainable development." *Campaign Against the Arms Trade.* The proliferation of small arms in the DRC starts, among other places, in the UK.

"Civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict." UN Security Council Resolution 1325, 2000.

Congo (DRC) – 5.4 million deaths (2008 estimate). The world's second poorest country.

UNHCR estimate 1 million IDPs (internally displaced people), the DRC Interior Ministry estimate 6 million IDPs. There is no question that Congo has the bloodiest, nastiest conflict in the world, but the amount of attention it has received is negligible. As in any armed conflict, women have borne the brunt of the war in the DRC. Women are usually left with the burden of taking care of shattered families in volatile and hostile conditions. They must feed, protect, plant, earn, carry, and all the while try to avoid physical dangers. And quite often, they have to do these things after being forced to leave their homes.

Rape was, and still is, used as a weapon of war. In the 13+ year conflict tens of thousands of women have been subjected to rape, torture and humiliation. Four years after the first democratic elections in the Congo, fierce fighting continues to flare up... it is still plagued by violence at the hands of armed militias, foreign rebel groups and its own army, particularly in the eastern region bordering Rwanda. Women and girls continue to be sexually assaulted by members of the many warring militias, many of whom are infected with AIDS. Young girls are routinely forced into militias, as fighters, porters and sex slaves. Conflict and neglect have left the country's health system in tatters. 58.6 percent of pregnant women are anaemic.

*Sources for information: www.msf.org www.caat.org.uk www.saferworld.co.uk www.peacewomen.org www.womenwarpeace.com
www.Dfid.gov.uk www.noynoy.org http://www.theirc.org/where/congo http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/key-issues/conflict-in-congo
http://www.congonow.org http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2009/1202
Women in Peacebuilding Network African Network of Young Peace-builders*

As the largest bilateral donor to the DRC the UK government can be part of the solution. We commend the UK's support to the DRC but, on top of the £130 million in aid, the UK government must use its influence in other ways.

We call on the British government to:

- Implement the UK laws on arms brokering and strengthen the EU Code of Conduct on arms exports.
- Support moves at the UN for an internationally binding Arms Trade Treaty.
- Implement policy commitments on conflict prevention and arms sales in affected regions.
- Demand that women have seats at the peace negotiation tables and their role must be a genuine one in the peace process and afterwards.
- Demand the DRC government afford protection for civilians.
- Increase the capacity of health agencies on the ground and finance new partners with expertise in sexual violence and the prevention and transmission of HIV/AIDS. Support local women's and peace organisations.
- Tighten restrictions to ensure that no UK companies import 'conflict minerals' from the Congo.

We invite you to sign and send this leaflet as a letter to: The Prime Minister, Rt.Hon. David Cameron, 10 Downing Street, London SW1. Copy it, and ask others to do the same.

Signed.....Name.....

Address.....

**Women in Black, C/o The Maypole Fund, PO Box 14072, London N16 5WB
Donations for leaflets etc most welcome. www.womeninblack.org.uk**

Women in Black holds vigils every Wednesday between 6-7 pm at the Edith Cavell Statue, opposite the door of the National Portrait Gallery, St.Martin's Place, London WC2. The vigils are silent, women-only and if possible we wear black.