

### **Liechtenstein Support For Rape Survivors Offers Hope For Dilapidated Congolese Hospital**

Baraka, DRC: The Government of Liechtenstein has awarded \$21,000 to [SOS Femmes en Danger \(SOSFED\)](#), a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP) that works with survivors of armed sexual violence in the isolated territory of Fizi, Eastern Congo. The grant will allow SOSFED to offer a range of services at its center in Fizi Town, while at the same time injecting badly-needed funds into the desperately poor local hospital.



**New arrivals at the SOSFED center in Fizi Town: many are referred to distant hospitals because of conditions at the local hospital**

"We congratulate the government of Liechtenstein for supporting women in a region which is often isolated and forgotten," said SOSFED's Executive Director Marceline Kongolo. "This will give us courage in going forward and reassure the women of Fizi."

Liechtenstein becomes the second government to support SOSFED after Germany, and their combined grants will be particularly useful at SOSFED's centre in Fizi Town, which took in 94 rape survivors last year. All survivors will be

offered three months of food, shelter, training and the chance to recover in the company of other women - a rare luxury for hard-pressed Congolese women.

SOSFED will also install a water well and manioc mill near the center, where all women from the village can draw water and turn their manioc into cooking flour. This will reduce the need to travel long distances alone in search of water, and thus limit the exposure of women to sexual violence. SOSFED has used this approach in the village of Mboko, where over 500 families a day use a well and mill installed in 2011.



**Empty beds at Fizi hospital: Costs are covered by patient fees, which deters many from seeking treatment**

While sexual violence may be slowly declining in Mboko, Fizi Town remains extremely dangerous for women. Dr. Asende Ehebelo Delphin, director of health for the region, said that his health centers took in around 370 rape survivors last year - an increase over 2011. Fighting usually leads to sexual violence, and an AP mission was barred from Fizi Town last week because of tension between government troops and local militia.

SOSFED relies on others to provide medical care to its beneficiaries, but this is difficult in Fizi Town because of the restrictive approach of international agencies and primitive conditions in the local hospital. Agencies provide kits which can prevent pregnancy if used within 72 hours. But these are of little use to most survivors, who are often too shocked to seek help quickly and who suffer serious long-term medical consequences because of the extreme violence of attacks.

Until now, Fizi hospital has offered little except more anxiety. During a visit to Fizi Town in 2012, AP met one young woman, Vumi, who was repeatedly raped by four armed men on the way to market. She was pregnant at the time. After passing out by the roadside, she eventually made it back to her home to find that her husband had left. Two days later she aborted the fetus at Fizi hospital, which charged her \$50. The hospital pursued her for payment after she sought refuge at the SOSFED shelter.

AP visited the hospital and found broken glass, blood on the surgery floor, and large worms in the open drains. Only two of the six solar panels which ran the hospital generator were working. Toilets were blocked, and there was no running water or incinerator hospital waste.

The problem, said Dr. Ehebelo, is that only 5 of the 36 doctors and nurses receive a government salary. As a result, all of the hospital's costs are born by patients like Vumi, who are usually indigent. The Red Cross provides free medicine for in-patients, but does not pay for out-patient consultations, drugs or treatment, said Dr Ehebelo.



**In need of repair: The surgical ward at Fizi Hospital**

Under an agreement to be signed with the hospital, SOSFED will use funds from its donors to pay for a medical check-up for all SOSFED beneficiaries. Drugs will cost an extra \$6 per patient, and surgical interventions will be funded separately. SOSFED and AP will also approach donors about improving conditions at the hospital and training staff. For example, Dr. Ehebelo said that

while his doctors treat cases of uterine prolapse they cannot repair obstetric fistula, which can result from violent rape.

Meanwhile, two advocacy quilts that were embroidered by SOSFED survivors in the Congo are among 24 quilts that went on show Wednesday at Kean University in New Jersey. The exhibition will run until May 10.

- Read more on [SOSFED](#)
- See the Congolese [Ahadi quilts](#).