

## Congolese Army Deserters Blamed for Mass Rape of 170 Women in South Kivu

["I Fear Nothing"](#) - watch AP's video tribute to the women of South Kivu

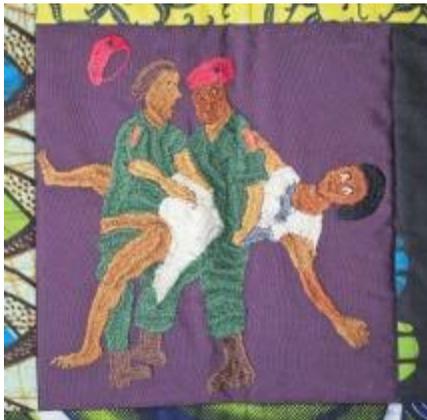


Photo by Brian Gohacki

Uvira, DRC: In a series of savage attacks, over 170 women have been raped in South Kivu by former Congolese government troops who abandoned their posts in disgust and are taking out their anger on civilians.

The attacks occurred at the villages of Nyakiele and Abala, near the capital of Fizi Territory. They have left communities reeling and shown yet again that the international community is helpless to curb sexual violence in the eastern Congo.

[Walter James](#), a Peace Fellow with The Advocacy Project (AP) who is working with AP's Congolese partner, SOS Femmes en Danger (SOSFED) [posted blogs](#) on Sunday after meeting with UN officials on their return from Nyakiele: "The level of brutality that this particular area of Fizi Territory is experiencing is astounding," he writes. SOSFED has treated 70 survivors at two centers in Fizi this year. Almost all were raped by government soldiers.

Meanwhile, attacks on aid workers are also on the rise. Several relief vehicles have been targeted in recent weeks, and on May 12 an SOSFED official, M'munga Selemane, was shot in the head by a government soldier while escorting women home. Mr. Selemane survived and the incident is under investigation. On June 9, ten women were raped by local militia at Kazimia, where an SOSFED center was looted last year.

The latest mass rapes were carried out by former members of PARECO (the Coalition of Congolese Patriotic Resistance), a militia that operated in North Kivu until it was integrated into the Army. Around 170 soldiers reportedly left a government compound on June 9 in a rage after their demands were ignored. They attacked 121 women at Niyakiele and then descended on Abala to rape around 50 more women. Their commander, Colonel Kifaru Niragiye, has also deserted.

Sexual violence has escalated sharply this year in Fizi. Most of the mass rapes in the west are the work of Hutu paramilitaries, who fled from Rwanda after the 1994 genocide. They

appear to be using rape to terrorize villagers and lay claim to minerals and food. But they also operate from isolated, inaccessible areas and are hard to intercept.

Elsewhere in Fizi, the main threat comes from the Congolese army (FARDC), which should be easier to regulate. This, however, has been complicated by the Government's strategy for bringing militia under one command.

Some militia have been enticed to join the Army by being allowed to retain their privileges, but have taken this as a signal to rape with impunity. Other groups, like PARECO, have been put under more pressure and reacted with anger. The government has also moved troops around the region, but this often creates ethnic tensions. Finally, when government troops are pulled out to be redeployed, they are usually replaced by brutalized undisciplined local militia.

"The people of Fizi, particularly the women, are paying the price of this experiment gone awry," writes Mr. James.

Under prodding from the UN, the government has prosecuted several high-profile cases this year, but aid workers expect little change until the UN and donors intervene more aggressively. Adding to its isolation, Fizi is usually avoided by most visiting high-level delegations.

AP has worked in South Kivu since 2008 and is supporting SOSFED on a grant from the [Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations in Berlin](#). Under the program, SOSFED and AP have helped survivors to describe their ordeal through a series of quilts. These are [profiled online](#) (photos above and right).



Photo by Brian Gohacki

[Anna McGuire](#), an 11 year-old student from the Pyle School in Washington, has created her own website and raised \$600 for two sewing machines. AP also features the quilters in a new video posted on Youtube.

- Read [Walter's blogs](#)
- Meet the women of Kivu in the new [AP video](#).
- Find out about [SOSFED's program](#) and the [Ahadi quilts](#)
- To exhibit the quilts or donate, contact [AP's Outreach Coordinator](#)