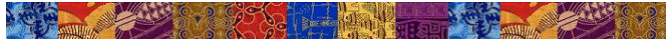


Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice



Statement to the Women's Court Bukavu, Eastern DRC, 15 October 2010

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Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice

Greetings to everyone attending the World March for Women in Bukavu, especially those participating today in the Women's Court organized by the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice and our courageous partners in eastern DRC.

The March and the Women's Court are both important moments for raising awareness about women's rights and gender equality worldwide as well as the need for accountability and prevention of violence against women especially in armed conflicts in eastern DRC, the Great Lakes area and in every region of the world.

The Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice is an international women's human rights organisation which works with women in armed conflicts and advocates for the International Criminal Court to prosecute gender-based crimes in every situation under its investigation. We work on conflicts in eastern DRC, Uganda, Sudan and the Central African Republic. Next year we begin our work in Kenya and Krygyzstan.

We work closely with women most affected by these armed conflicts to promote gender justice; to support domestic efforts for conflict prevention, resolution and accountability; for women to be able to participate in peace talks and the implementation of peace agreements; as well as for the prosecutions of gender-based crimes before the ICC and for women to benefit from assistance and eventually reparations from the Court, national Governments and the United Nations.

Over the last six years the Women's Initiatives has held many workshops and events with women's rights activists, victims/survivors and peace advocates in four situations under ICC investigation. From Bangui to Gulu, from Bukavu to Nyala, women most affected by these conflicts speak about the need for justice as a means to improve their lives, restore their communities and transform their countries. In each of these situations, the work of the ICC is vital, because for many women it is their greatest hope, for some their only chance perhaps for justice - for someone to be held accountable for what happened to them, with the hope that this should not happen to others.

The Women's Court comes just four days after the public announcement of the arrest warrant by the ICC for Callixte Mbarushimana, the alleged Executive Secretary and political leader of the *Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda* (FDLR), charged with acts committed in the Kivu. Specifically Callixte Mbarushimana is charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity including murder, torture, rape, inhumane acts, destruction of property and persecution based on gender-based crimes.

In accordance with the warrant of arrest issued under seal by the judges of the ICC, on 28 September, 2010, the French authorities arrested Mr Mbarushimana. The suspect will remain in the custody of the

French authorities while they consider the request to hand him over to the ICC. We welcome this arrest and hope that this is the start of accountability and ultimately prevention of future gender-based crimes and for peace to take root in the Kivus.

This Women's Court builds on the tradition of 'people's tribunals' utilized by activists to highlight injustice and advocate for equality. During today's Court we will hear the voices, analysis and experiences of victims/survivors and activists regarding militarization, the situation of rural women in eastern DRC and the need for credible peace agreements and implementation of provisions ensuring security, an end to conflict and lawlessness, and accountability for gender-based crimes. Gender Justice advocates here and around the world are calling for an end to conflict-related impunity. We join together for peace to emerge, for economic sustainability and prosperity to flourish, and for healing and recovery processes to begin.

Although often unnoticed by war mongers and decision-makers alike, the voices of women have been clear and their calls for justice consistent. At this Women's Court, it is time for women's voices to be heard.