



## Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice



**Media Contact(s):**  
**Brigid Inder**  
**Executive Director**  
**Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice**  
**0031 (0) 70 302 9911**

**Bukeni Waruzi**  
**Program Manager - Africa**  
**WITNESS**  
**bukeni@witness.org**

### **WITNESS, Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice and JUPEDEC's new documentary exposes LRA's gender-based crimes in the Central African Republic**

*The nine-minute video advocates for investigations into the LRA's activities in the Central African Republic and for assistance and support to victims/survivors of LRA violence*

**The Hague** (May 30, 2012) – At a meeting today with the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), WITNESS and the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice screened the never before seen film, [Our Plea: Women and Girls from the Central African Republic Turn to the ICC for Justice](#). In the [video](#), two courageous young women recount their abduction by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the rapes, sexual violence and beatings they suffered while in captivity, as well as their life following the return to their communities. The [video](#) calls on the ICC to open investigations into the gender-based crimes committed by the LRA in the South-Eastern region of the Central African Republic (CAR) and on the CAR government to provide victims/survivors of sexual and gender-based crimes committed by the LRA with adequate assistance, including medical treatment, counseling, economic assistance and support for their education.

This documentary is part of a larger initiative between Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice and WITNESS to produce six gender justice advocacy videos highlighting sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflicts, fragile states and post-conflict environments, where the Women's Initiatives and its partners have established programs and networks. Since the beginning of this joint initiative in 2010, more than 30 of Women's Initiatives' partners from the CAR, the DRC, Uganda, Kenya and Kyrgyzstan, all of them women's human rights and peace advocates, have participated in a series of video advocacy trainings and subsequently were able to film, conduct interviews and co-edit the videos. In this framework, in 2011, JUPEDEC conducted interviews with victims/survivors of LRA in the CAR, and, with the help of WITNESS and Women's Initiatives, developed their stories into a 9-minute film.

The [video](#) sheds light on previously unheard stories of the atrocities that the LRA committed in the Central African Republic and on the way they continue to affect victims/survivors. "Now, my head is not calm, my way of thinking is different," says Nanzouno-Dadine Lea, one of the two women featured in the film, talking about her life after escaping from the LRA camp. "When I think of my future it looks grim because of the men who destroyed my life." Ms. Lea was abducted by the LRA one evening on her way home from working in the fields.

In 2005, the ICC issued arrest warrants against Joseph Kony and four other senior LRA commanders for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Northern Uganda. The following year, Kony and the LRA moved out of Northern Uganda, conducting operations in several neighboring countries including the CAR and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Since February 2008, the rebel group has been carrying out attacks in the South-Eastern provinces of the Central African Republic. It is estimated that hundreds of women and girls have been abducted and forcibly recruited by the LRA in attacks against the civilian population of the Central African Republic. Many of those who survive and return to their communities have contracted sexually transmittable diseases or are pregnant as a result of the multiple rapes they were subjected to during their captivity. Once they return, no assistance measures are in place to facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration within their community. Because the region in which the LRA operates is very remote and with limited infrastructure, it is very difficult—if not impossible—for government officials to learn of and investigate attacks.

“We have been advocating for the ICC to open investigations into crimes committed by the LRA in CAR, the DRC and South Sudan since our meeting with women’s rights and peace advocates in CAR in 2009” says Ms Brigid Inder, Executive Director of the Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice. “Extending the investigations to these countries will reflect the scope and scale of the crimes committed by the LRA beyond Uganda’s borders” she added. In part because of the remoteness of the region affected by the LRA, there are no clear statistics on the number of victims of LRA attacks in the South-Eastern provinces of the Central African Republic. However, estimates report hundreds of victims. “Information available from public reports indicate that from February 2008 until March 2011 almost 300 people have been killed and over 870 abducted during attacks carried out by the LRA. “These are estimates based on the lowest figures provided in the reports. In reality, the figures are likely to be much higher” Ms. Inder added. Based on our work on the LRA in three countries since 2004, their pattern is to rape and sexually enslave girls and young women who are each assigned to LRA commanders.”

The [film](#) is a crucial advocacy tool in highlighting the urgent need for action by the ICC and the CAR government to ensure justice for the victims, prevent further LRA crimes in the Central African Republic, and provide much needed assistance to victims/survivors.

“The women in the film have courageously put aside their fears to tell their stories and demand justice. With great strength and dignity, they are speaking out and taking matters in their own hands, in the hopes the world will respond swiftly and thoroughly to their pleas.” Bukeni Waruzi, WITNESS Program Manager for African and the Middle East.

Today’s screening will be the first in a series of screenings for high-level officials in The Hague, the Central African Republic and the United Nations.

“Women have died in the bush, and others keep on suffering,” says Lea. “I am asking ICC to have Joseph Kony and his officers arrested. They should be brought to justice to answer for what they have done, for the sufferings and losses and the blood which has spilled in the Central African Republic.”

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## Note to Editors

### **About the campaign**

Women from the CAR ask the ICC:

- To open investigations into the crimes committed by the LRA in the Central African Republic with a specific focus on sexual and gender based crimes against women and girls

Women from the CAR ask the Central African Republic government:

- To implement measures for the rehabilitation and reintegration of former LRA abductees returning to their communities. These measures should address sexual and gender-based crimes and the needs of girls, women and former female abductees returning with children
- To provide victims/survivors of sexual and gender-based crimes committed by the LRA with adequate assistance, including medical treatment, counseling, economic assistance and support for their education
- To effectively cooperate with the ICC towards the arrest and surrender of LRA members against whom the Court has issued arrest warrants

A link to the film can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFYut4AxKtk>

### **About WITNESS**

WITNESS is the global pioneer in the use of video to expose human rights abuses. We empower people to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools for justice, promoting public engagement and policy change. Founded in 1992, WITNESS has partnered with more than 300 human rights groups in over 80 countries, trained over 3,000 human rights defenders, developed widely-used training materials and tools, and increased the visibility and impact of over 100 campaigns by supporting the inclusion of video. [www.witness.org](http://www.witness.org).

### **About Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice**

The Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice is an international women's human rights organisation that advocates for gender justice through the International Criminal Court (ICC) and through domestic transitional justice mechanisms, as well as through advocating for the inclusion of women and the integration of gender issues within formal peace processes and negotiations.

The Women's Initiatives has a network of over 6,000 members and partners, individuals and organisations, who are grassroots women's rights and peace advocates from armed conflict or post conflict situations, victims/survivors groups, networks of women living in IDP camps, women's rights and development organizations, transitional justice

networks, human rights organizations, parliamentarians, and members of the security sector.

The Women's Initiatives works with women and communities most affected by each of the seven armed conflicts under ICC investigation and has country-based programmes working with local women's rights actors and peace advocates in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Kenya and Libya. The Women's Initiatives has a legal monitoring and advocacy project on the Côte d'Ivoire and a violence against women advocacy project in Kyrgyzstan.

### **About Jeunesse Unie pour la Protection de l'Environnement et le Développement Communautaire (JUPEDEC)**

JUPEDEC is a Central African organisation working on human rights, humanitarian support and community development with activities in protection, health care, education, livelihoods support and infrastructures.

Based in Zémio in the South East of the CAR, JUPEDEC is active throughout the country.

JUPEDEC is one of the few organizations addressing the impact on communities affected by LRA attacks, including on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), women and girls, and returnees.