

**In Harm's Way: Girls in Settings of Endemic Armed Violence**

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**Girls at gunpoint: experiences from the DRC**

**Ms Bibiane Aningina Tshetu, Women as Partners for Peace in Africa, DRC**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to share my message with you today on behalf of Congolese women and girls, and the women of IANSA.

The Congo war has been called the deadliest war after World War II and the worst place to be for a woman. Why?

The conflicts involve several armed groups which have committed mass violations of universal human rights and international humanitarian law. Since war started in 1996, guns have spread across the country. Another war in 1998 has made things worse.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now over a million small arms are in circulation in the Great Lakes region with a heavy concentration in the east of the DRC. Data on arms transfers is difficult to acquire but we know that at least 11 African countries produce ammunition for small arms and light weapons, and 6 of these countries share borders with the DRC. Militias with guns have the power to terrorise, kill, burn homes, and rape.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The civilian population has been the main target of the conflict. There have been millions of deaths. Hundreds of thousands of women and girls abducted. Most of them brutally raped.

All schools have been damaged and destroyed. Boys and girls recruited at gunpoint to become child soldiers. Millions of them have been deprived of their right to education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Girls often become sex slaves. The fear of being rejected by society means they may refuse to leave these groups even if they have the opportunity. It is very difficult for child soldiers to find their place in the world.

Rape continues to be used as a weapon of war to intimidate and terrorise the population. The only way for the people to survive is to run away, if they can.

Most rape survivors, abandoned by their families and communities are condemned to live in utter poverty.

Many have died, and those who survive deal with horrifying consequences which include unwanted pregnancies, fistulas, mental illness, and HIV/AIDS. Most do not receive medical treatment.

It is clear. Guns facilitate the destruction of more than 50% of the Congolese population.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the DRC an arms embargo applies to non-state armed groups, but we all know that weapons are often sold to them by government forces. This must stop. Now.

Also, an international Arms Trade Treaty is soon to be negotiated and must stop supplies from entering countries bordering the DRC so that they cannot be diverted to the country.

In addition, an Arms Trade Treaty must also not allow international transfers of weapons and ammunition where there is a significant risk of sexual and gender-based violence, or grave violations of human rights.

Thank you for your attention.