

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission within the House of Representatives.

Hearing

“Violence Against Women : Thursday, April 15 , 2010

Testimony Presented by Major General Patrick Cammaert

Thank you Chairman and all the members of the Human Rights Commission for inviting me here today and taking the time to talk about this important issue. My name is Patrick Cammaert. I retired in 2007 as a Major General after 39 years in service. Operating in conflict zones have been large parts of my career, most importantly during the years I served with the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). I have witnessed that violence directed at women and girls can be a particularly potent tool of war. The weapon of rape can be considered as an efficient form of biological warfare that is inexpensive to implement, effective over large areas, and does not particularly endanger the attackers. Its effectiveness relies on the perception, deeply embedded in patriarchal societies, that women's sexuality is a prefecture of male ownership, and it is linked to the persistence of unequal gender relations and particularly to the way women's bodies are regarded. Its impact is multiplied when the woman becomes pregnant and the attack is then passed on to the next generation.

In the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, I have seen the perpetrators of these crimes, foreign and national armed groups; -and members of the Government army and police who are believed to constitute the single largest group of perpetrators. I have also seen the victims, women and girls, sometimes as young as nine,. A doctor told me that some of them had their insides been blown apart by rifle blasts. The level of brutality is shocking even by the twisted standards of a place haunted by warlords and drug-crazed child soldiers. On any given night in Eastern DRC, armed groups of men will overrun a village and divide into bands of three to five, forcing themselves into houses where they seize and serially rape women and young girls. The majority of the women reported that they were tortured during the rape itself. I will never forget the three girls we found in the

vicinity of an IDP camp, naked. A group of militias had raped them in front of their family before killing their parents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters. The girls pretended to be dead and survived. We covered them with our shirts. This was the least we could do for them.

Sexual violence has been identified as a tactic of modern warfare in several conflicts, most importantly in the Eastern part of the DRC and in Darfur. It is also identified as a war crime, a crime against humanity and a form of genocide. But recognition has not been a very effective deterrent. This form of atrocity continues, and if anything is intensifying in brutality and frequency. Doctors in Panzi Hospital in Bukavu in the South Kivu Province in DRC who has been treating sexual violence survivors for a decade told me about an emerging pattern of destructive and sadistic behavior by the perpetrators which they classify as a new pathology called rape with extreme violence (REV). Violence against women, and particularly sexual violence, has special characteristics that have kept it off the radar of national, regional and international-security institutions.

Ladies and gentleman, sexual violence is not a gender or women's issue, it is a security issue. Let me give you six reasons:

- First, organized rape undermines public order. Sexual violence is a remarkably efficient means of severing family and community bonds tearing apart families and whole communities, sexual terror – targeting women and children –has forced countless families to flee their homes, daring never to return.
- Second, sexual violence prolongs conflict – rape and pillage is often the only incentive arms-bearers have, to continue fighting. Or as a colleague of mine, the former UN SRSG in Bosnia-Herzegovina Elisabeth Rehn, was told by a former commander: *'How can you expect us to tell subordinate commanders that their troops can't rape when it's the only thing they have to offer them.'*
- Third, sexual violence undermines chances for an inclusive, sustainable peace because it precludes women's participation through intimidation. It also hampers sustainable development; no nation can achieve development, while raping its greatest resource.

- Fourth, if perpetrators are not prosecuted – and they rarely are because of inadequate response to sexual violence in national and international transitional-justice systems – it is very difficult to rebuild these systems and respect for the rule of law. Impunity for perpetrators and those responsible for these criminal acts higher up in the chain of command means that known human-rights abusers go free, often to assume positions of national and local leadership.
- Fifth, rampant sexual violence increases the spread of HIV/Aids, which the Security Council has recognized as a threat to international security.
- Sixth, sexual violence is an expensive and highly destructive weapon that effectively destabilizes societies and creates conditions ripe for terrorism.

Ladies and gentlemen, strong military and security-sector responses are needed from the apex global-security institution – the UN Security Council – as well as from regional and national-security institutions. In a meeting with the leaders of top troop contributing countries, President Obama acknowledged that *“UN peacekeeping can deliver important results by protecting civilians, helping to rebuild security, and advancing peace around the world. To succeed, UN. missions and contributors need to be better equipped and supported to fulfill ambitious mandates, be it securing territory or protecting civilians from violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.”* It might be true that it is extremely difficult to find effective military and security responses to sexual violence. However, there is no doubt that there are actions that can make a difference:

- The United States can take a lead position to encourage the Security Council and other security institutions to take urgent steps to reverse a global culture of impunity for sexual violence.
 - Peacekeepers, police and military, could help in prevention, and in apprehension of perpetrators and support for prosecutions.
 - A stronger focus on encouraging the participation of women military and police by troop/police-contributing countries, including by the U.S is a positive sign.

- The International Violence Against Women Act is an opportunity to offer a comprehensive approach to this critical issue and to formulate new policy that places a priority on addressing this security threat.

Sexual violence as a weapon of war creates instability and fosters terror: it must be addressed as a serious element of foreign policy and conflict intervention.

Thank you.