



CU Amnesty International

Petition briefing: Justine Masika Bihamba



Justine Masika Bihamba and her family have been attacked because of her work as coordinator of a women's human rights organisation.

In September 2007 soldiers forced their way into Justine's home while she was out, and tied up her six children at gunpoint. One of the soldiers assaulted her eldest daughter, then sexually assaulted and attempted to rape another daughter.

Although Justine and her children were able to identify the soldiers, they have not been arrested or brought to trial.

'All we want is an end to this impunity' - Justine Masika Bihamba, 2008

Justine Masika Bihamba is coordinator of a women's rights organisation, Synergie des Femmes contre les Violences Sexuelles. Workers at the organisation have regularly been threatened and attacked because of their peaceful work against sexual violence.

Rape and sexual violence are endemic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), particularly in the east of the country. The main perpetrators are members of Congolese and foreign armed groups, along with soldiers and police. Over the last few years an increasing number of sexual attacks by civilians have also been reported. Many rapes, especially those by armed groups, involve genital mutilation or other extreme acts of brutality. Some groups also abduct girls and women as sex slaves.

Very few perpetrators of sexual violence are brought to justice. In 2006, a new law was introduced to strengthen judicial procedures and penalties for sexual crimes, but it has not been widely implemented. Rape survivors are stigmatised, suffering social and economic exclusion. Few have access to adequate medical care. The continuing rape crisis in the DRC is part of a broader pattern of violence and endemic discrimination against women in the country.

UPDATE 5 JULY 2009: Amnesty UK received a letter from Justine

Hi everyone,

I am lost for words to express my deep gratitude for your support in these difficult times. Be assured that the cards you have sent have fortified thousands of women in Nord Kivu who had lost hope. I would like to say to each one of you how grateful I am. Once again thank you.

Justine Masika Bihamba