

Statement of Dr. Denis Mukwege on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict on 19 June 2017

Bukavu (19 June 2017) – As sexual violence continues to be committed on a large scale worldwide, today's International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict serves as a reminder that society must eradicate one of the most painful and shameful consequences of war.

In conflicts around the world, from Congo and South Sudan to Syria and Myanmar, rape is a method of warfare deployed to terrorize and destroy entire populations. Sexual violence creates life-long physical and psychological trauma, destroys family bonds, increases the spread of preventable diseases, and leaves deep and long-standing marks on entire communities.

The violence committed against the bodies of women and men, boys and girls, is the disgrace of the 21st century.

It is time to stand up and fight against these crimes at a global level. Building a global movement that prioritizes survivors, civil society members and organizations is critical to eradicate sexual violence.

Today, we also remember the victims and honour the survivors of sexual violence around the world. Their courage and strength in overcoming fear and stigmatization is a great source of inspiration.

This year's theme of the international day "preventing sexual violence through justice and deterrence," raises awareness on a critical aspect in the fight against rape as a weapon of war. The prosecution of the crimes not only helps to prevent violence through deterrence. Courts also offer victims an avenue to obtain justice for and acknowledgement of their suffering.

Survivors of sexual violence are increasingly standing up to draw attention to this neglected, global problem and advocate for justice and reparations. We call on governments to become more involved and respond to their call. States have the responsibility and authority to join efforts and enforce the prohibition on the use of sexual violence in conflict.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 19 June of each year the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

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