



SEMA gathers victims and survivors of wartime rape from all around the world, acting in solidarity and mobilising collectively to speak out about the reality of sexual violence in conflict, and creating change through innovative awareness raising and advocacy actions.

www.semanetwork.org

Facebook @semanetwork



www.mukwegefoundation.org
info@mukwegefoundation.org

The Hague Office
Laan van Meerdervoort 70
2517 AN The Hague
Netherlands

Tel.: +31 70 364 88 14

Supporting survivors to speak out and break the silence

Since its creation, the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation has put survivors of wartime rape at the core of its mission to end rape as a weapon of war.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are being used systematically as a weapon of war in numerous conflicts worldwide to terrorise and destabilise entire populations. Perpetrators target civilians with grotesque violence that involves gang rape, sexual slavery, and other atrocities. Survivors face a cascade of consequences from permanent physical injuries, to long-term, debilitating post-traumatic stress disorder, and from crippling social stigma to exclusion from legal redress or compensation. Moreover, rape during conflicts reinforces gender inequalities and normalises sexual violence, even after a conflict has ended; the consequences go beyond individual traumatising, and harm societies as a whole over generations.

With tremendous courage, survivors work to obtain justice and rebuild their lives, but their voices are often actively silenced. This needs to change.

The Mukwege Foundation envisions a world in which rape as a weapon of war is no longer tolerated. We work for a future where survivors worldwide receive the holistic care they need and obtain reparations; where they have the freedom to speak out and to organise globally to end wartime sexual violence. Therefore, we work to support a survivor-led global movement to empower survivors to engage in organised activism that fights both the root causes and the consequences of conflict-related sexual violence.

In June 2017, we facilitated the first of a series of international survivor retreats, uniting survivors of sexual violence from more than 15 countries around the world. Since then, these survivors have been organising themselves and have started to develop their own activities, at international and national levels.

Today SEMA, the Global Network of Victims and Survivors to End Wartime Sexual Violence, gathers survivors from 21 different countries, and works with frontline organisations supporting them in their healing and advocacy journeys.

"Being with all the other survivors made me feel respected, loved and free, this is what I am striving for. With them, I realised that I am not alone, that survivors are strong, and that together we can bring positive change." A survivor from DRC, November 2018



SEMA: a unique global network

Despite extraordinary barriers, the survivors have already created incredible momentum for change. They have met three times since 2017 to share their experiences, form bonds with one another, and identify explicit actions to move forward. What reverberated from these gatherings was the enormous untapped power of these women, and the clarity of their call, **“Nothing about us, without us”**.



At its last global retreat in November 2018 in The Hague, the group decided on the name **SEMA** for their network. ‘Sema’ means ‘Speak out’ in Swahili, the mother tongue of Dr. Denis Mukwege, who is an inspiration for all survivors and NGO representatives working to abolish the use of rape as a weapon of war.

In March 2019, SEMA met for its third global report and worked on its four main goals:

- **Maintaining a safe international platform for survivors to come together and strengthen one another:** through the adoption of a charter of values, the implementation of an exchange programme between members, and the development of joint strategies at regional level.
- **Raising awareness about the reality, causes and consequences of wartime rape worldwide:** through the creation of a website and a Facebook page for SEMA, the development of awareness raising activities & tools.
- **Recreating the narrative on wartime rape through memorialisation tools:** through the creation of a virtual museum on wartime sexual violence, the celebration of national days of remembrance, and by advocating for an International Day for Survivors of Wartime Sexual Violence on 5 October every year.
- **Advocating for the abolition of the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war:** through the launch of a global report and the implementation of joint strategic advocacy to monitor national developments and influence international processes.

Find out more about SEMA’s global retreat [here](#).



SEMA in action!

Taking inspiration from these encounters, the women are creating change that no one could have expected. By coming together and speaking out, they shift the shame onto the perpetrators, break the silence and the stigma, and call on the international community to take action and abide by its commitments to end the use of sexual violence in conflict.

From joint statements to unprecedented mass demonstrations and inspiring speeches at international events, they are speaking out powerfully and acting together.

The list below highlights some of their achievements since their first international meeting in June 2017:

- [The survivors displayed art work and performed](#) at a [large exhibition](#) hosted in Geneva in June 2017, organised by the Mukwege Foundation. In this [video](#), they discuss what it means to be a part of a global network.
- In November 2017, as part of the 16 days of activism against violence against women, Tatiana Mukanire from DRC wrote "[A Letter to my Rapist](#)" ([here](#) in French); she requested its dissemination in a personal statement against the use of rape as a weapon of war.
- In November 2017, the global network sent [video messages](#) of support and solidarity to a conference for the Asian "comfort women" who were sexually exploited by Japan during the Second World War.
- For the [16 days of activism to end violence against women](#) in December 2017, the global network contributed to awareness raising by sharing texts, videos and other activities.
- In February 2018, the [survivors came together](#) for a strategic meeting and developed their goals for the global network.

"SEMA allows us to meet, to have a common language, which is our suffering. We remain united throughout the whole world, we are united by empowerment, strength, and we have many reasons to contribute to the future because our voices are being heard." Survivor from Ukraine, March 2019

- In March 2018, two survivors, Nidia Cortes Parra from Colombia and Esperande Bigirimana from Burundi, received the [#ChangeTheCulture award](#) on behalf of the global network, by the organisation Theirworld on International Women's Day.
- In March 2018, the survivors produced and disseminated this [statement](#) to the UN Security Council on the Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security and sexual violence in conflict, in support of survivors in Darfur, Sudan.
- For International Women's Day 2018, the survivors used their [singing] voices to make a statement about what it's like to experience sexual violence in conflict in their song, ["I'm Just a Little Bird"](#).
- In April 2018, on the initiative of the DRC survivor movement, more than 800 survivors gathered to demonstrate against the surge of violence, particularly mass rapes in the region. They issued a [press release and a memorandum](#) towards decision-makers.
- On [19 June 2018](#), Vafrije Krasniqi Goodman (Kosovo), Guillaumette Tsongo (DRC), Fareeda Khalaf (Iraq) and Oumou Barry (Guinea) spoke at a high-level event in the framework of the 38th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. They also met with ambassadors and representatives of Canada, Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, UK and South Korea, calling for justice and reparations.



- On the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, the national network of survivors in DRC organised an [event in Bukavu](#), which gathered almost 200 participants, including institutions and partners.
- Four survivors of the global network, Vafije Krasniqi Goodman (Kosovo), Tatiana Mukanire (DRC), Sylvia Acan (Uganda) and Salwa Khalaf Rasho (Iraq), participated in the [first Memorial Day for 'Comfort Women'](#) celebrated in South Korea on 14 August and spoke at the International Symposium where they expressed their solidarity with Korean women. On this occasion, Sylvia was awarded the [first Kim Bok-dong Peace Prize](#).
- In October 2018, Sylvia Acan (Uganda) and Dalal Ali Kheiro (Iraq) engaged hundreds of fundraisers at the [annual conference of the Resource Alliance](#), in The Netherlands, by speaking about the strength of survivors and their solidarity to raise awareness and bring change.
- In November 2018, SEMA attended the international event of the Mukwege Foundation "[From words to action: repairing the wounds of wartime sexual violence](#)". Semka Agic (Bosnia) and Sylvia Acan (Uganda) explained why reparations are key to survivors' healing and empowerment journeys. Two representatives of frontline NGOs Feride Rishiti (Kosovo) and Pilar Rueda (Colombia) shared good practices for effective and transformative reparations policies. Altogether, with the Mukwege Foundation, SEMA called for an international reparations mechanism. Listen to Vafije Krasniqi Goodmann, interviewed in The Hague, in this [podcast](#).
- In December 2018, more than 500 persons, including 322 survivors of wartime rape, participated in the [launch of the survivor movement in Central African Republic](#), called MOSUCA.
- In January 2019, Consilee Nishimwe (Rwanda) and Vafije Krasniqi Goodman (Kosovo) participated in an expert meeting on reparations in New York, where the International Reparations Initiative was discussed with UN agencies and States. Their contribution was crucial to ensure that survivors' needs and voices are at the core of such an initiative.
- In February 2019, Sylvia Acan (Uganda) spoke about wartime sexual violence during the 7th edition of the conference "Women on the front lines" organised by the May Chidiac Foundation in Lebanon.
- In March 2019, the Mukwege Foundation was at the [63rd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women](#): we put survivors' voices at the core of our side event on holistic care, co-sponsored by Belgium, France, Senegal and Switzerland. Tatiana Mukanire (DRC) and Vafije Krasniqi Goodman (Kosovo) called for universal access to holistic care for all victims of wartime rape. They also participated in other advocacy and networking meetings to present SEMA's demands.
- On 26-27 March 2019, SEMA participated in the [Stand Speak Rise Up](#) international conference, organised by Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, in partnership with the Mukwege Foundation and We Are Not Weapons of War. Twenty members of SEMA spoke in different panels as experts during the event about holistic care, reparations, survivors' movements, children

born of rape, the use of technology, justice — all issues where the survivors' perspective is needed for relevant action to be taken.

- At the end of March 2019, Tatiana Mukanire (DRC) spoke about the impact of rape as a weapon of war during an [international event organised in Paris by IUV-IFJD](#).
- In April 2019 Tatiana Mukanire, the coordinator of the DRC survivors' movement, was [in Geneva](#) to present the key recommendations of a [joint report submitted to the Universal Periodical Review of DRC](#) to the Human Rights Council. Based on the experiences of survivors of DRC, the report highlights the need to fight impunity, to address the lack of access to reparations & holistic care, and the urgent need to implement prevention and a proper strategy to achieve equality between women & men.
- After Geneva, Tatiana Mukanire (DRC) was in Brussels on 4 April 2019, to bring the voices of survivors of wartime rape in an [event about holistic care for survivors of sexual violence](#) organised by Doctors of the World Belgium.

At each of these events, the impact of SEMA is strong: survivors' voices brings the human and concrete understanding of the situation and needs of victims, and get concrete ideas for change, as the survivors are the ones having the best vision for the most needed concrete actions.



The **Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation** is an international human rights organisation working together with survivors of wartime sexual violence from around the world.

Drawing attention to the most shameful crimes committed during conflicts, the Foundation envisions a world in which rape as a weapon of war is no longer tolerated.

Together with its special adviser, the Congolese gynaecologist, Nobel Peace Laureate, and women's rights activist Dr Denis Mukwege, the Foundation works for a future where survivors worldwide receive the holistic care they need and obtain reparations; where they have the freedom to speak out and to organise globally to end wartime sexual violence.

Through international advocacy and country-based programmes, the Foundation supports survivors in their struggle for recognition and their active participation in the development of international and national policies related to justice, peace and women's rights.