

Statement by Dr. Mukwege on the International Day to Eliminate Sexual Violence Against Women – November 25, 2020

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“ On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and young girls, our thoughts are with all victims and survivors of violence and abuse.

Violence against women and girls comes in many forms, and this violence knows no cultural, social or economic barriers. It concerns us all!

It encompasses backward customs, social norms, misogynistic and discriminatory practices, which range from conjugal and domestic violence to harassment in students, in the workplace or on public transport, including the forced marriage of children and human trafficking, so-called “honor killings” and rape.

This violence devastates the lives of millions of women in conflict and post-conflict societies, but also in peacetime, and has serious consequences for physical and mental health of women.

Violence against women and children is not only one of the most serious violations of human rights, but also a veritable public health pandemic and a serious obstacle to the resolution of many global challenges such as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

As the international community commemorates the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the Rights of Women this year, it is clear that no country today can claim to be a champion on women's human rights. However, we are convinced of the universality of the rights of women and that the degree of any civilization is evaluated in particular according to its treatment of women. To despise women is to despise life, and to fight against gender-based violence is to fight for human survival.

These are the reasons why, until all women are safe from violence, we will continue to advocate for justice and for a profound paradigm shift in our societies by making gender equality a reality. There is still a long way to go for a more inclusive, egalitarian and prosperous world, but it bears hope because, as everyone knows, investing in women and girls means investing in the benefit of society as a whole and of our general interest.

Realizing the full potential of women is therefore the key to achieving sustainable development, societal progress and economic prosperity, but will require a deep awareness of the whole of society, a real cultural upheaval aimed at transcending stereotypes and reorganizing the roles that society assigns to men and women, and giving everyone deserved places at all levels of the pyramid, including at its summit!

It is therefore about bridging the gap between common sense and prejudice, between scientific evidence and preconceived ideas, and between law and practice.

The time has come for men to take responsibility and commit to positive masculinity in order to achieve equality in law and in practice!

Let us eliminate discrimination against women, backward customs and machoism, sexist and misogynistic practices that shame our humanity and undermine the prospects for development and progress. Let's break the silence, change the mindsets of our children and end impunity and sexual and gender-based violence.

Let us all be united, boys and men, young girls and women, political leaders and actors of civil society, in a spirit of mutual respect, complementarity and solidarity, to make this century one of women and progress for all, where everyone has the right to make their choices freely, to realize their full potential and to live in accordance with human dignity.”

Dr Denis Mukwege  
Nobel Peace Prize