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Democratic Republic of Congo, Human Rights

Democratic Republic of Congo: World's Attention on Human Rights

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a large country in the heart of Africa. It has a larger population of about 76.2 million people in the country. The country of Tanzania has less with about 53.88 million and Ethiopia has more with about 99.87 million people. Years of civil war and no working political system have kept this country in a third world position. In 2006 a new constitution was adopted and a new government was set up. This is when they became a more stable democratic presidential republic. Though this country has been working hard on its government system, the problem that really faces this country is a mass of sexual violence.

My solution to this problem includes a working government system. The current system still needs some work, here's how it's set up. They have branches of government like the United States of America. The Executive branch is similar to the United States because they choose their cabinet of advisors. It is made up of mostly ministers and some state ministers. Any one of them can be removed from the cabinet by a vote of no confidence. However, if the prime minister gets voted down the whole cabinet is discarded and set up again.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has a two branch parliament made up of two houses; they are the upper and lower houses known as National Assembly and the Senate. The National assembly is more powerful than the Senate. The members of the lower house are elected by direct suffrage to a five-year term and are made up of 500 seats. There are sixty-one from single member votes. The other members are elected in multi-member votes. The Senate is comprised of members elected by the legislators of the 26 provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In the 2006 election, the Democratic Republic of Congo engaged in a wide range of judicial reforms to ensure that the judicial branch of the government was independent of the other branches of government. Although the constitution guarantees the freedom of the Judiciary branch, there is still quite a bit of interfering from the Executive and the Legislative branches. The Judicial branch is made up of the Supreme Court, Court of Cession, and the Constitutional Court. The president, in consultation with the Judicial Service Commission, is responsible for the hiring of new judges.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has never really had a working government. When it gained independence in June of 1960, Patrice Lumumba was made prime minister and Joseph Kasavubu was made president. Within three months Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba as prime minister. Three

months after that Lumumba was arrested. He was murdered in the next three months. Supposedly the United States and Belgium were involved in it. The President appointed a new Prime Minister named Moise Tshombe. A violent uprising kicked both of these men from power. The government's power changed hands several more times in the years that would follow.

Not only has the Democratic Republic of Congo been plagued by political reforms and unrest, it has been plagued by violence and human rights violations. In 1994, the Tutsi and Rwandans started a violent war. In 1996, the Tutsi captured much of eastern Zaire. Zaire is what the Democratic Republic of Congo was renamed in 1971. Once they captured the eastern part of Zaire the violence started.

After Tutsi rebels took over Rwanda they attacked refugee camps in eastern Zaire. A total of 50,000 people died from cholera in the refugee camps. As the camps became more militarized, aid agencies stopped working in the camp. Former Hutu soldiers controlled the access to food and distribution of food to the camps.

This background information sets up the stage for the real problem that I want to talk about. Which is the mass amount of rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Statistics show that one woman is raped every 4 seconds in this country. (Lent, 2012) These outrageous acts of violence and violation of human rights are more often than not done by soldiers.

The soldiers that commit these crimes are not necessarily the same soldiers from the earlier invasion of Zaire. The Democratic Republic of Congo is very rich in diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, and zinc. These materials should bring prosperity to the country but it really just causes conflict. Warlords are constantly fighting for them and the mines the materials are brought out of. When the warlords target a mine they also attack the village that goes with the mine. The tool of rape has become so used that in 2008 sexualized violence was perceived as "normal" by local villages in the eastern Congo.

Sexualized Violence is used as a tool of war in several ways and the reasons the soldiers and people give are: to humiliate, protect soldiers, get rid of babies, control of communities, territory, or natural resources, to increase food insecurity, retaliation, and to let out their anger and frustration.

The soldiers say they are protected by raping women because they rely on the magic power of raping women. Some think that it is what makes them battle ready and strong. Others say they are only doing it for their magic potion and rape is what makes it work. The humiliation they give to these women is not as strategic and it is for fun but also a little complex. The humiliation brings

many women to silence. There is a militia group fighting the violence called the Lord's Resistance Army. The men rape women so they won't tell the Lord's Resistance Army where they are at. Some of the soldiers tend to target pregnant women in their attacks. Women say that after their encounters with the soldiers they have miscarriages. One woman remembers the man purposely used objects to abort her baby. Some men say they didn't want to commit these crimes, but if they didn't rape the women their superiors would hurt them.

For the soldiers fighting for the mines and materials they provide, rape is a much more strategic play. Soldiers don't attack women in villages that they believe are gaining their trust. The control that rape provides is an incredible amount. The soldiers will wait and decide whether to control the village with rape or make them think they are being protected when there is no violence.

Mai Mai soldiers say that there is a difference between rape to fulfill their needs and evil rape. The evil rapes, unfortunately, include child mutilations and abuse. They claim that Satan makes them do it, that it is sometimes a sudden desire that would never affect them in civilization.

A lot of the soldiers do it for the release of anger and frustration. The stress and anger they need to get rid of is usually hunger, living in poverty standards, and being unloved by their wives. They say that spending too much time in the African bush without women is a leading cause of why they rape women. They think they have to do something bad, that when you mix all the bad feelings together you feel you need sabotage, the women, stealing, and killing. They use all this as an excuse to rape women. They use it when they describe when they rape and when the Hutu soldiers rape. They also rape for retaliation, to control the wives of important figure heads, or when a community supports a different militia group.

The options for these soldiers to rape are in a large supply. According to the studies two-thirds of the country live in small rural villages scattered around the country. Many practice subsistence farming, so they are easy targets. If the village is attacked and food supply is cut the village is at the mercy of the soldiers.

Each group of soldiers usually has trademarks to their rapes. Rwandan soldiers tend to gang rape, Burundian forces rape men along with women, and the Mai Mai mutilate victims, usually using branches or bayonets in the attack. To even hear a few of their stories is enough to sadden anyone. Dr. Denis Mukwege, a gynecologist who at the time performed vaginal reconstructive surgeries for the victims of rape quotes, "They rape a woman, five or six of them at a time, but that is not enough. Then they shoot a gun into her vagina. In all my years here, I never saw anything like it. To see so many raped, that shocks me, but what shocks me more is the way they are raped."

This country has never had a workable government, and I think that is where the problem could be fixed. Since its freedom from Belgium, the government has been constantly changing in this country. Within nine months the first prime minister was murdered after being arrested. Five years after that government the next one was overthrown in a violent uprising. Since then war and corrupt leaders have damaged this country. The world's attention on this country has made the problem of sexual violence in this country a matter to be fixed. If the government was to be completely stable they could try to partner with other countries on this issue. If multiple countries were to band together and fight these rogue soldiers the problem could be eradicated much faster.

One other solution is to make the agricultural system better. These soldiers use food to control the villages they take. By controlling the amount of food that gets into these villages they have the whole village under their control. If the agricultural system was better, food would be more available than the subsistence farming that happens right now in this country. The lack of food to everyone very well could also be warping the soldier's minds. If they are underfed and mistreated it is not hard to believe that they are violent to the villagers. If the country can strengthen their agricultural system, they can start to properly address the issues that face their country.

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