



**SYNERGIE DE FEMMES POUR LES VICTIMES
DE VIOLENCES SEXUELLES**

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Ensuring peace and equal political representation of women in DRC [Translated from Original French]

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Mr President, Excellencies,

Good morning. I would like to thank the Swedish Ambassador who invited me here so that I could speak on behalf of Congolese women, too often victims of sexual violence, and excluded from the management of public affairs and peace negotiations.

I am a Woman Human Rights Defender and the Chair of the Board of Directors of Synergie des Femmes pour les victimes des Violences Sexuelles, a platform of 35 organizations working for the improvement, promotion, defense, respect and protection women's rights and especially women who are victims of sexual violence. We also intervene in governance, advocacy, the protection of human rights and the construction of a lasting peace in North Kivu in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Today, I would like to address three themes:

- MONUSCO,
- The increase in insecurity and the increase of cases of sexual violence against women and girls;
- The tense political climate following the failure to hold elections within the constitutional deadline.

MONUSCO

The decision to close some MONUSCO bases exposes the civilian population in sensitive areas once again. Despite the rapid deployment, interventions often arrive too late, when irredeemable acts already have been committed. Following a decrease in financial resources, the Joint Human Rights Office is no longer present on the ground and, as a result, can no longer effectively document the cases of serious human rights violations that are now reported by phone.

The population also fears unrest and misbehavior on election day and hopes that MONUSCO will ensure the training of Congolese police in order to maintain order and secure polling stations.

The increase in insecurity and the increase of cases of sexual violence against women and girls

In the DRC the situation of women and particularly those victims of sexual violence is worsening by the day due to the proliferation of armed groups. These groups are at the root of repeated wars, causing mass rapes and population displacements, mainly women and their children. Cases of rape and violence increased this year by more than 60% in North Kivu.

The tense political climate following the non-holding of elections within the constitutional deadline

The political climate in the DRC is very tense due to the non-holding of elections within the constitutional deadline. Several demonstrations have been shut down by the police, civilian deaths occurred, material damage was extensive (especially convents and Catholic churches), arbitrary arrests of leaders of the citizen movement, of political actors of the opposition

and if human rights defenders took place. Five months before elections are due to take place, political abatement is far from being a reality for activists still imprisoned.

In addition to this political instability and the brutal repression of dissident voices, several legal reform projects initiated by the Congolese government tend to further reduce Congolese freedom of expression and civic space. Among them, a reform aims at modifying the operating regime of NGOs (national and international), and another, the fight against terrorism. If these reforms are adopted in their current terms, the key principles of the rule of law will be undermined.

The low participation rate of women in the current electoral process and other decision-making bodies

The Electoral Law, promulgated on 24 December 2017, constitutes a serious obstacle to the rights and freedoms of the Congolese people. It imposes many constraints, including the requirement for candidates to reach a threshold of representativeness of at least 1% of votes at the national level. As a result, no provincial election candidacy had been filed by the deadline date in some constituencies. In addition, this law discriminates against women in the electoral contest by not taking into account their socio-economic conditions. The law imposes from candidates the payment of a deposit of \$ 1,000, an astronomical sum for women and young people, most of whom live with an income of less than \$ 1 per day. The Congolese Women's Forum on Resolution 1325, representing women from all provinces, has pleaded to the authorities of the Republic to demand that this project is abandoned.

The use of the voting machines proposed by the government is also disputed by the political actors and the majority of the population for fear of electoral fraud. The DRC currently has a population which is 65% illiterate - mostly women and young people, who would have enormous difficulties using these machines.

Finally, as a woman human rights defender, President of the Board of Directors of Synergie des Femmes and on behalf of all excluded and abused women, we recommend to the Security Council and the Member States:

- To put pressure on the DRC Government to implement a policy that truly promotes women's participation in decision-making and women's candidacies for elections;
- To ask the Government to respect freedom of expression, the right to demonstrate and the civic space of the Congolese population;
- To require the Government to respect the Saint Sylvestre Agreement, the Constitution and the rule of law;
- That MONUSCO restore its bases in sensitive areas to ensure the effective protection of civilians, support the ongoing electoral process and ensure that the Joint Human Rights Office effectively documents human rights violations through field visits;
- To materially support civil society organizations that work for the promotion and defence of women's rights to train women in leadership to be able to access decision-making positions.

Thank you once again for giving me the honor, as a woman human rights defender, to make the voices of the voiceless heard.

Thank you.