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PRESS RELEASE

Violence against Women and their Status in the DRC: The UN Reiterates OMCT and ASADHO's Concerns

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On 25 August 2006, at the end of its 36th session, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted its concluding comments after having examined, on 8 August, the State report of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.¹

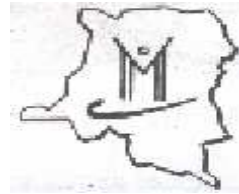
In July 2006, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) submitted a "shadow report" in collaboration with the African Association for the Defence of Human Rights (ASADHO) in view of the consideration of the State report by CEDAW (see *Violence against women in the DRC* at http://www.omct.org/pdf/vaw/2006/CEDAW_36th/cedaw36_drc_en.pdf).

The NGO report denounces the situation of women in the DRC, in particular the acts of violence they are subjected to daily. It puts forward several measures in order to fight the impunity enjoyed by the authors of such violence and the inferior position conferred to women in Congolese society – two main obstacles that hinder women's enjoyment of their fundamental rights.

The report by OMCT and ASADHO, as well as the conclusions of the Committee, are especially preoccupied by the persistence of several legal provisions which discriminate against women in the Family Code, the Labour Code and the Criminal Code. The Committee "*urges the State party to present to the future Parliament the reform of the Family Code as a high priority*". Moreover, the NGO report indicates the existence of a draft law on the revision of that legislation, proposed by Réseau Action Femmes (RAF) and complemented by the Studies and Documentation Department of the Ministry of Justice.

Concerning violence perpetrated against women, the Committee "*is deeply concerned about the continuing occurrence of rapes and other forms of sexual violence against women and the engrained culture of impunity for such crimes, which constitute grave and systematic violations of women's human rights*". At the legal level, OMCT and ASADHO's report mentions existing initiatives for fighting against sexual violence, such as the law that criminalises sexual violence which is awaiting presidential approval.

¹ Additional information on the session and CEDAW's concluding comments are available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/36sess.htm>.



The Committee also recalls the State's duty to ensure women's access to justice, which is often limited by factors such as illiteracy, legal costs, lack of information on their rights and lack of assistance in pursuing their rights. Legal aid services and measures to raise awareness on how to utilise available legal remedies are required to fight against discrimination and impunity. The judiciary must also become more familiar with the Convention and the State party's obligations.

Moreover, confronted with the *“strong persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deeply rooted stereotypes”*, the Committee *“urges the State party to introduce measures without delay to modify or eliminate cultural practices and stereotypes that discriminate against women”*, in collaboration with civil society organisations, women's groups and community leaders, as well as teachers and the media. As noted by OMCT and ASADHO in their shadow report, the Committee states that *“education is a key to the advancement of women”*. It urges the DRC *“to implement measures to ensure equal access of girls and women to all levels of education, retain girls in school”* and *“overcome traditional attitudes that constitute obstacles to girls' and women's education”*, such as pregnancy and early or forced marriage.

Concerning women's health, the Committee recommends that the DRC intensify its efforts to improve women's access to emergency obstetric care and health-related services, aiming to reduce the maternal mortality rate. The State party is also called *“to improve the availability of sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, also with the aim of preventing early pregnancies and clandestine abortions”*. Regarding HIV/AIDS, the NGO report by OMCT and ASADHO develops the situation of women infected by the virus and their difficulty in imposing the use of condoms on their spouses.

OMCT and ASADHO welcome CEDAW's concluding comments and ask the Congolese State, especially the newly elected representatives who will sit in local and national administration and in the Parliament, to fully implement these recommendations without delay, so as to ensure the compliance of the DRC with its international obligations.

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