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THE
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The Nobel Lecture

given by
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2018
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In the tragic night of 6 October 1996, rebels attacked our hospital in Lemera, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC). More than thirty people were killed. Patients were slaughtered in their beds point blank. Unable to flee, the staff were killed in cold blood.

I could not have imagined that it was only the beginning.

Forced to leave Lemera in 1999, we set up the Panzi hospital in Bukavu where I still work as an obstetrician-gynaecologist today.

The first patient admitted was a rape victim who had been shot in her genitals.

The macabre violence knew no limit.
Sadly, this violence has never stopped.

One day like any other, the hospital received a phone call.
At the other end of the line, a colleague in tears implored: "Please send us an ambulance fast. Please hurry"
So we sent an ambulance, as we normally do.

Two hours later, the ambulance returned.
Inside was a little girl about eighteen months old. She was bleeding profusely and was immediately taken to the operating room.

When I arrived, all the nurses were sobbing. The baby's bladder, genitals and rectum were severely injured.

By the penetration of an adult.

We prayed in silence: my God, tell us what we are seeing isn't true.
Tell us it's a bad dream.
Tell us when we wake up, everything will be alright.

But it was not a bad dream.
It was the reality.
It has become our new reality in the DRC.

When another baby arrived, I realized that the problem could not be solved in the operating room, but that we had to combat the root causes of these atrocities.

I decided to travel to the village of Kavumu to talk to the men: why don't you protect your babies, your daughters, your wives? And where are the authorities?

To my surprise, the villagers knew the suspect. Everyone was afraid of him, since he was a member of the provincial Parliament and enjoyed absolute power over the population.

For several months, his militia has been terrorising the whole village. It had instilled fear by killing a human rights defender who had had the courage to report the facts. The deputy got away with no consequences. His parliamentary immunity enabled him to abuse with impunity.

The two babies were followed by several dozens of other raped children.

When the forty-eighth victim arrived, we were desperate. With other human rights defenders, we went to a military court. At last, the rapes were prosecuted and judged as crimes against humanity.

The rapes of babies in Kavumu stopped.
And so did the calls to Panzi hospital.
But these babies' psychological, sexual and reproductive health is severely impaired.

What happened in Kavumu and what is still going on in many other places in Congo, such as the rapes and massacres in Béni and Kasai, was made possible by the absence of the rule of law, the collapse of traditional values and the reign of impunity, particularly for those in power.

Rape, massacres, torture, widespread insecurity and a flagrant lack of education create a spiral of unprecedented violence.

The human cost of this perverted, organized chaos has been hundreds of thousands of women raped, over 4 million people displaced within the country and the loss of 6 million human lives. Imagine, the equivalent of the entire population of Denmark decimated.

United Nations peacekeepers and experts have not been spared, either. Several of them have been killed on duty. Today, the United Nations Mission is still in the DRC to prevent the situation from degenerating further.

We are grateful to them.

However, despite their efforts, this human tragedy will continue if those responsible are not prosecuted. Only the fight against impunity can break the spiral of violence.

We all have the power to change the course of history when the beliefs we are fighting for are right.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Distinguished members of the Nobel Committee, dear Madam Nadia Murad, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends of peace,

It is in the name of the Congolese people that I accept the Nobel Peace Prize. It is to all victims of sexual violence across the world that I dedicate this prize.

It is with humility that I come before you to raise the voice of the victims of sexual violence in armed conflicts and the hopes of my compatriots.

I take this opportunity to thank everyone who, over the years, has supported our battle. I am thinking, in particular, of the organizations and institutions of friendly countries, my colleagues, my family and my dear wife Madeleine.

My name is Denis Mukwege. I come from one of the richest countries on the planet. Yet the people of my country are among the poorest of the world.

The troubling reality is that the abundance of our natural resources – gold, coltan, cobalt and other strategic minerals – is the root cause of war, extreme violence and abject poverty.

We love nice cars, jewellery and gadgets. I have a smartphone myself. These items contain minerals found in our country. Often mined in inhuman conditions by young children, victims of intimidation and sexual violence.

When you drive your electric car; when you use your smart phone or admire your jewellery, take a minute to reflect on the human cost of manufacturing these objects.

As consumers, let us at least insist that these products are manufactured with respect for human dignity.

Turning a blind eye to this tragedy is being complicit.

It's not just perpetrators of violence who are responsible for their crimes, it is also those who choose to look the other way.

My country is being systematically looted with the complicity of people claiming to be our leaders. Looted for their power, their wealth and their glory. Looted at the expense of millions of innocent men, women and children abandoned in extreme poverty. While the profits from our minerals end up in the pockets of a predatory oligarchy.

For twenty years now, day after day, at Panzi hospital, I have seen the harrowing consequences of the country's gross mismanagement.

Babies, girls, young women, mothers, grandmothers, and also men and boys, cruelly raped, often publicly and collectively, by inserting burning plastic or sharp objects in their genitals.

I'll spare you the details.

The Congolese people have been humiliated, abused and massacred for more than two decades in plain sight of the international community.

Today, with access to the most powerful communication technology ever, no one can say: "I didn't know".

With this Nobel Peace Prize, I call on the world to be a witness and I urge you to join us in order to put an end to this suffering that shames our common humanity.

The people of my country desperately need peace.

But:

How to build peace on mass graves?

How to build peace without truth nor reconciliation?

How to build peace without justice nor reparation?

As I speak to you, a report is gathering mold in an office drawer in New York. It was drafted following a professional investigation into war crimes and human rights violations perpetrated in Congo. This investigation explicitly names the victims, the places and the dates, but leaves the perpetrators nameless.

This Mapping Report by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights describes no fewer than 617 war crimes and crimes against humanity and perhaps even crimes of genocide.

What is the world waiting for before taking this into account? There is no lasting peace without justice. Yet, justice is not negotiable.

Let us have the courage to take a critical and impartial look at what has been going on for too long in the Great Lakes Region.

Let us have the courage to reveal the names of the perpetrators of the crimes against humanity to prevent them from continuing to plague the region.

Let us have the courage to recognize our past mistakes.

Let us have the courage to tell the truth, to remember and commemorate.

Dear Congolese compatriots, let us have the courage to take our destiny in our own hands. Let us build peace, build our country's future, and together build a better future for Africa. No one else will do it for us.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends of peace,

The picture I have painted for you depicts a dark reality.
But let me tell you Sarah's story.

Sarah was referred to the hospital in critical condition. An armed group had attacked her village, massacred her whole family, and had left her alone.

Sarah was taken to the forest as a hostage, and tied to a tree. Naked. Sarah was gang-raped every day until she lost consciousness.

The aim of these rapes used as a weapon of war is to destroy the victim, her family and her community. In short, to destroy the social fabric.

When she arrived at the hospital, Sarah could not walk or even stand on her feet. She could not control her bladder nor her bowels.

Because of the seriousness of her genital, urinary and digestive injuries coupled with an infection, no one could imagine her one day being able to get back on her feet.

Yet, with each passing day, the desire to continue to live sparkled in Sarah's eyes. Every passing day, it was she who encouraged the medical staff not to lose hope.

Today, Sarah is a beautiful, smiling, strong and charming woman.

Sarah has committed herself to helping people who have survived a history like hers.

Sarah received fifty US dollars, a grant our Dorcas transit house gives to women who are ready to rebuild their lives socio-economically.

Today, Sarah runs her small business. She has bought a plot of land. The Panzi Foundation has helped her with sheeting to make a roof. She has built a little house. She is independent and proud.

Her experience shows that, no matter how difficult and hopeless the situation, with determination there is always hope at the end of the tunnel.

If a woman like Sarah does not give up, who are we to do so?

This is Sarah's story. Sarah is Congolese. But there are Sarahs in the Central African Republic, Colombia, Bosnia, Myanmar, Iraq and many other conflict-riven countries in the world.

At Panzi, our holistic care programme – which includes medical, psychological, socio-economic and legal support – shows that even if the road to recovery is long and difficult, victims have the potential to turn their suffering into power.

They can become agents of positive change in society. This is the case already at City of Joy, our rehabilitation centre in Bukavu where women receive support to regain control of their destiny.

However, they cannot succeed on their own and our role is to listen to them, as today we listen to Madam Nadia Murad.

Dear Nadia, your courage, your audacity, your ability to give us hope, are a source of inspiration for the entire world and for me personally.

The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to us today will be of value only if it leads to concrete change in the lives of victims of sexual violence all over the world and the restoration of peace in our countries.

So, what can we do?
What can *you* do?

First, it is incumbent upon all of us to act in this direction.

Taking action is a choice.

It is a choice:

- whether or not we stop violence against women,
- whether or not we create a positive masculinity which promotes gender equality, in times of peace and in times of war.

It is a choice:

- whether or not to support a woman,
- whether or not to protect her,
- whether or not to defend her rights,
- whether or not to fight on her side in countries ravaged by conflict.

It is a choice: whether or not to build peace in the countries in conflict.

Taking action means saying 'no' to indifference.

If there is a war to be waged, it is the war against the indifference which is eating away at our societies.

Second, we are all indebted to these women and their loved-ones and we must all take ownership of this fight; including states by ceasing to welcome leaders who have tolerated, or worse, used sexual violence to take power.

States must stop welcoming them by rolling out the red carpet, and instead draw a red line against the use of rape as a weapon of war.

This red line would consist of imposing economic and political sanctions on these leaders and taking them to court.

Doing the right thing is not hard. It is a matter of political will.

Third, we must acknowledge the suffering of the survivors of all acts of violence against women in armed conflicts and support their holistic recovery process.

I insist on reparations: the measures that give survivors compensation and satisfaction and enable them to start a new life. It is a human right.

I call on States to support the initiative to create a Global Fund for reparations for victims of sexual violence in armed conflicts.

Fourth, on behalf of all widows, all widowers and orphans of the massacres committed in the DRC and all Congolese in love with peace, I call on the international community to finally consider the "Mapping Project report" and its recommendations.

May justice prevail.

This would allow the Congolese people to weep for their loved-ones, to mourn their dead, to forgive their torturers, to overcome their suffering and finally to project themselves into a serene future.

Finally, after twenty years of bloodshed, rape and massive population displacements, the Congolese people are desperately awaiting implementation of the responsibility to protect the civilian population when their government cannot or does not want to do so. The people are waiting to explore the path to a lasting peace.

To achieve peace, there has to be adherence to the principle of free, transparent, credible and peaceful elections.

“People of the Congo, let us get to work!” Let’s build a State at the heart of Africa where the government serves its people. A State under the rule of law, capable of bringing lasting and harmonious development not just of the DRC but of the whole of Africa, where all political, economic and social actions will be based on a people-centred approach to restore human dignity of all citizens.

Your Majesties, Distinguished Members of the Nobel Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends of peace,

The challenge is clear. It is within our reach.

For all Sarahs, for all women, for all men and children of Congo, I call upon you not only to award this Nobel Peace Prize to my country’s people, but to stand up and together say loudly: “The violence in the DRC, it’s enough! Enough is enough! Peace, now!”

Thank you.

Denis Mukwege