

Burundi: A cry for justice from rape survivors



A 19-year-old girl is gang-raped by several policemen, one of whom had abducted her father, gets pregnant as a result and attempts suicide. Her mother is severely beaten and raped. The father never returned. Another rape victim becomes HIV positive. A man - yes, punitive rape doesn't spare men - is violated until he loses consciousness.

Violence against women and girls affects all places in the world. Burundi though is one of the countries where the lives and dignity of women might carry the least weight. Domestic violence is endemic. Large numbers of sexual assaults are recorded every week, including against little girls or grandmothers.

Rape is also a political weapon that resurfaces at each crisis in Burundi. It's a tool used to punish those who dare oppose the powers that be. The bodies of wives, mothers and daughters become a battlefield where policemen and members of the *Imbonerakure* militia humiliate and dehumanize their enemies. Men perceived as belonging to the opposition suffer the same fate, though that remains largely a taboo topic.

The stories that we will tell over the next days, as the world commemorates the United Nations' 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, are those of Burundian men and women targeted during the 2015 political turmoil. They have taken refuge in another country. Today, they've accepted to recount the unspeakable, because they hope that justice can be done.

Helping them on that difficult path are the members of the Women's and Girls' Movement for Peace and Security in Burundi (MFFPS), a group of exiled women human rights defenders that includes lawyers and professionals who do their best to provide assistance and seek justice for these survivors. The OMCT stands with them.

Read the stories:

Anésie, surviving a family tragedy

Delia, raped as a form of punishment

Fidèle, men too are targets of sexual violence

Natalie, how to recover a sense of dignity