

## Mothers of Congo - Tragedy in DRC

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The Mothers of Congo evening on Friday 1st March combined music and food from the Congolese community with harrowing testimonies and videos from those who have suffered terribly in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The accounts on video of women who had been raped and who were being counselled as a group were particularly painful. Their courage to speak about their ordeals and to march as a group in a demonstration to publicise the use of rape as a weapon of war to terrorise and destroy communities in the mineral rich and lawless eastern DRC.

Charlotte Simon, Josee Wilkinson and other 'Mothers of Congo' brought a dignity to the call to bring justice and peace to this area. They spoke of the need to break the silence and to expose the complicity of foreign powers. There were many other NGOs represented at the evening who knew each other well.



Charlotte Simon representing Mothers of Congo witnessed the shocking atrocities in Kisangani, DRC in 1998. There was an invasion by Rwanda and Uganda on the 4th of August 1998. The Congolese people suffered rape and massacres in the bid to control the mineral resources in the area. She decided to stay to help but she was directly threatened by Laurent Nkunda Batware, Chief of Staff of Rwandan forces during that time, and she had to escape back to the UK.

She has been working since then to raise awareness of the ongoing suffering of the innocent Congolese women and children. Reported rapes are among the highest in the world. Senseless child soldiers are frequently involved in the violence. There has been so many people killed in the drive to control the mineral wealth of the region. Adding to the injustice are the memories of the welcome given to visitors from Rwanda and Uganda in the past.

Chris Yates explained the campaign he and others are devising to explain the deadly consequences of the minerals extracted from this tragic area of the world where more than 6 million have died in the conflict in the last 15 years. He showed a video from the Enough NGO in the US that revealed the minerals used in smart phones and laptops are creating millionaire warlords in eastern DRC. The greed to control this wealth has led to the systematic reported rapes of 1150 women per day.



The history of inter-ethnic conflict and seeking of revenge exacerbates the situation as militias and child soldiers seek to ethnically cleanse areas around the mines and control the trade and taxes of the extracted minerals. Such 'conflict minerals' have great suffering behind their use. The benefit of those minerals should be for the Congolese people. It was said it should be the Switzerland of Africa due to the wealth of the minerals of the nation.

The audience laughed at me when I mentioned my shock that there were accusations of Blue Helmet UN soldiers from some nations complicit in sending minerals back to their nations. I was assured it was common knowledge that UN soldiers were also participating in this illegitimate trade.



The activities explained were:

- 1) Humanitarian support for rape victims - TG Foundation
- 2) Targeting 'conflict minerals' by legislation - US Dodd-Frank law clause 1502 - EU equivalent
- 3) Targeting 'conflict minerals' by media and pr campaign Chris Yates and friends
- 4) Raising awareness of sexual violence as a weapon of war
- 5) Awareness of the roles of neighbouring nations especially Rwanda and Uganda

At the conclusion of the evening several people were presented with Ambassador for Peace awards particularly to those who were active in trying to resolve this tragedy. The programme was enhanced by music from Marva Sobambi and Congolese singer, Lilas Lafleur.