

PODCAST: The power of bearing witness – how rape became an ‘act of genocide’

15 February 2017 – Shame and stigma prevent many rape survivors in conflict zones from reporting the horrific abuses they endure at the hands of war but the criminals whose sole aim in carrying out these horrific deeds is to torture and humiliate their enemy.

Yet the courageous testimonies of women who survived rape during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda provided the evidence required for a United Nations war crimes tribunal to find Jean-Paul Akayesu guilty, four years after the shocking conflagration, marking the first judgment for the crime of genocide under international law.

Rape was made a part of Akayesu’s genocide conviction.

In the latest episode of the *UN Radio* podcast series *The Lid is On*, Michele Mitchell, a co-director of the documentary film, *The Uncondemned*, was researching how and when rape was first prosecuted as a crime of war for her next project when she first heard about the so called ‘Akayesu’ case.

She began by studying the wrong case. Most of the documentation she found had to do with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

It was not until Ms. Mitchell spoke to a human rights lawyer Sara Darehshori, a senior counsel for the Human Rights Watch United States’ programme, that she found out about a historic trial that went before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

We promise to speak only the truth, to say what we saw and not what we heard; for justice not revenge

At the time, almost 20 years ago, Sara was a co-counsel for the prosecution. She is the one who found the ‘smoking gun’ that allowed the UN tribunal to amend its indictment against the former Mayor of Taba town in Rwanda, Jean-Paul Akayesu, and try him for rape as an act of genocide.

During the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, in a span of one hundred days, between eight-hundred thousand and one million men, women and children were massacred by Hutu militia – a rate of killing four times greater than at the height of the Nazi Holocaust.

Michele said she did not want to do “just another prosecutor’s story.” She wanted to include the women who had testified during this historic trial. She said that she wanted to understand what motivated these women who had suffered so much to say “enough” and to take action.

"They were killed simply because of who they are; because they are Tutsis. Hutus protecting Tutsis or those married to Tutsis were also killed," said Adama Dieng, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide said during a screening of the film on the ground-breaking trial, organized by the Outreach Programme on the Rwandan Genocide and the United Nations.

As the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) came to a close, the world body's Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide and former ICTR Registrar Amada Dieng shares his experience in bringing innovation to the Tribunal.

In Taba alone, close to 2,000 Tutsis were murdered.

Many of the women were raped by the armed local militia, or *Interahamwe*, and communal police, investigations by the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, or ICTR, uncovered.

These acts of sexual violence were often accompanied by death threats. The women were also forced to endure multiple acts of sexual violence that were at times committed by one or more assailants.

The courageous testimonies of the rape survivors provided the evidence required for the ICTR's Trial Chamber to find Akayesu guilty of rape.

One witness, known as 'JJ,' and other rape survivors placed him at the scene of the crime, and confirmed that he used his authority to incite and encourage the militia and police to carry out these acts, although he was not accused of rape by any of the women.

On 2 September 1998, Jean Paul was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity. With this case, the ICTR became the first international tribunal to enter a judgement for genocide and the first to interpret the definition of genocide set forth in the Geneva Conventions, according to the UN Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals.

AUDIO: "The Lid is On" – UN Radio Podcast: "How rape became an act of genocide"

In the same judgement, the ICTR also defined the crime of rape in international criminal law and recognized rape as a means of perpetrating genocide.

Akayesu was sentenced to life for "criminally responsible for aiding and abetting" for rape as a crime against humanity.

Delivering a statement following the ruling, Judge Navanethem "Navi" Pillay, who went on to become the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the UN tribunal wanted to "send out a strong message that rape is no longer a trophy of war."

As the Rwandan women sat behind a curtain in a tiny court in Arusha, Tanzania

and recounted in painful detail the brutal and violent sexual assaults they endured during the genocide, they had no idea they would make history. And that by doing so, they would give hope to survivors like them.

[Situation in Central African Republic warrants continued international attention, UN Security Council told](#)

Situation in Central African Republic warrants continued international attention, UN Security Council told

15 February 2017 –

Despite improving security situation in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), concerns remain in other parts of the country, the top United Nations peacekeeping official told the Security Council today, underlining the need for continued international attention.

Particularly worrying were clashes between the *Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique* and the *Union pour la paix en Centrafrique* groups in the country's central region which had assumed ethnic overtones, said Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping in his briefing to the 15-member Council.

He added that the two groups were outside an ongoing dialogue, established by the country's President, Faustin Archange Touadera, with other armed groups which was making progress in such areas as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

In the briefing, the UN official further said that the organization supported an initiative for a national peace and reconciliation agreement recently launched by the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECOWAS) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as well as Angola, Chad and the Congo.

Similarly, adapting to the changes, the UN mission in the country (MINUSCA) is rearranging its deployment to ensure greater flexibility and dedicate more forces to its operations.

Also, the Portuguese rapid reaction force is now in place and French surveillance drones will be deployed to deter activities of armed groups.

On the humanitarian side, Mr. Ladsous voiced concern, particularly for the areas outside the capital. He informed the council that more than half of the population (over 2.2 million people) faced food insecurity and more than

100,000 had been newly displaced.

RELATED: Fresh violence in Central African Republic western town displaces thousands, UN office says

Furthermore, with 31 per cent of global security incidents involving non-governmental personnel reported in CAR in 2016, the country remained particularly challenging for aid workers.

Going forward, he urged the international community to continue to support the CAR, and pointed out that, all too often, it reacted at the height of a crisis, only to exit before economic development had taken root and human rights had been assured.

Also briefing the Council today, Omar Hilale, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations and the Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission echoed Mr. Ladsous concerns regarding the security situation.

Recent clashes in which hundreds were killed and thousands more displaced underscored the need to urgently address the security challenges, he stressed.

Further, Mr. Hilale also hailed the Government's adoption of a national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation strategy, a security policy, and a five-year capacity-building and development plan, and called on the to tackle the root causes of the conflict and urged the international community for their support.

He also informed the Security Council that an international conference on the CAR, held in the Belgian capital, Brussels, in November last year generated \$2.2 billion in pledges and spoke of the Peacebuilding Commission's work in the country.

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Central African Republic: Senior UN official condemns armed, forceful entry into hospital

[UN kicks off preparations for upcoming summit on oceans, launches voluntary](#)

commitment website

15 February 2017 – The world dumps the equivalent of one garbage truck of plastic into the ocean every minute, the United Nations heard today at the start of a two-day meeting to prepare for this June's Ocean Conference that will aim to help safeguard the planet's oceans and help them recover from human-induced problems.

When leaders from across Governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and the scientific and academic communities, gather together in New York, from 5-9 June for The Ocean Conference, we will be witness to a turning point, the President of the UN General Assembly, Peter Thomson, told the participants, who also included the Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden and the Minister for Fisheries of Fiji, the countries co-hosting the conference.

We will witness the point in history when humanity truly began the process of reversing the cycle of decline that accumulated human activity has brought upon the Ocean, Mr. Thomson added.

The high-level Oceans Conference aims to get everyone involved in conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 14.

The UN has called for voluntary commitments to implement Goal 14 and today launched an online commitment registry which has its first three commitments the Swedish Government, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and Peaceboat, a non-governmental organization. The site will be up through the end of the Conference, which starts on World Environment Day, marked annually on 5 June, and includes 8 June, celebrated as World Oceans Day.

The voluntary commitments underscore the urgency for action and for solutions, said Under-Secretary-General Wu Hongbo, who heads the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs and serves as the Secretary-General of the Conference.

Addressing participants today, Mr. Wu said preparations for the Conference are on track.

The health of our oceans and seas, and the future wellbeing of our planet and our society, demand no less, he said.

In addition to pollution, The Oceans Conference and SDG 14 address overfishing, as well as acidification and increasing global water temperatures linked to climate change.

Discussing the problems ahead of today's preparatory meeting, Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, Isabella Lovin said in a video log on Twitter that the Conference could be a chance of a lifetime to save the oceans under enormous stress.

“We don’t need to invent or negotiate something new, we just need to have action to implement what we already agreed upon,” she said in reference to the expected ‘Call to Action’ that will result from the Conference in connection with stopping illegal fishing, stopping marine pollution and addressing the special circumstances of small island developing States.

Representing one of the many small island nations struggling with these issues, the Minister for Fisheries of Fiji, Semi Koroilavesau, urged Conference participants to make voluntary contributions, saying the oceans are of “outmost importance” to his country.

[In Cairo, UN chief Guterres underscores political solutions to ease tensions in regional hotspots](#)

15 Cairo RATING: 6 REGION: General (non-region specific) SUBJECT1: PS SUBJECT2: Select a 2nd subject. CRITERIA1 terrorism CRITERIA2: Enter a 2nd criteria/keyword. In Cairo, UN chief Guterres underscores political solutions to ease tensions in regional hotspots United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today reiterated his commitment to fighting terrorism but underlined also the importance of political solutions to the crises in Syria and the wider region, and put his weight behind the intra-Syrian negotiations expected to begin later this month in Geneva.

Speaking to reporters in Cairo after meeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Secretary-General praised Egypt as a “central player” and an “absolutely essential contributor” to finding a solution to regional problems.

He referred to the international talks on Syria held earlier this month in the Kazakh capital of Astana which resulted in an agreement on how to monitor the ceasefire effort started in December 2016.

“The Astana talks were an important contribution because they led to a ceasefire and we hope that the ceasefire will be maintained,” Mr. Guterres said, “but we consider that without a political solution, not only ceasefires cannot hold, but more than that the fight against terrorism will not be effective.”

“That is why we are so committed to make sure that the political process moves on and I hope that Geneva will be an important step in that direction,” he added in a press conference alongside the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry.

Mr. Guterres also made reference to the Security Council, saying that it was “very important to recognize that the United Nations will be what Member States allow it to be.”



Secretary-General António Guterres (left) with Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry of Egypt address reporters at a press encounter in Cairo. Photo: OSSG

He stressed his personal commitment – echoing comments in Dubai days earlier – to reform the UN Secretariat and help to create “effective coordination and accountability” in the different UN bodies to strengthen the reputation of the United Nations at a global level.

During the press encounter, the Secretary-General also stated that there was “no Plan B” to the two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians: “Everything must be done to preserve that possibility.”

He also noted the situations in Libya and Yemen, calling for effective reconciliation and reconstruction to aid the people and the stability of the region.

Turning to Syria, Mr. Guterres noted that he has consistently said that the countries of the region that have been receiving so many Syrian refugees, as well as those from Iraq and from many other crises, the countries of the region – Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt – have not had enough support from the international community in general, from Europe in particular, both in relation to the refugees themselves and their living conditions and in relation to the host communities that share with them sometimes resources that are quite meagre.

Stressing that refugee protection is not only the responsibility of neighbours, but of the entire international community, The UN chief said it would be important to substantially increase the number of refugees that are resettled into Europe and other parts of the world in order to show effective solidarity with the countries of first asylum.

[Innovative, coordinated response helps end yellow fever outbreak in Angola, DR Congo – UN agency](#)

15 February 2017 – With concerted response, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have successfully controlled one of the world’s largest and most challenging outbreaks of yellow fever, the United Nations

health agency announced.

No new confirmed cases reported from both countries for the past six months

“We are able to declare the end of one of the largest and most challenging yellow fever outbreaks in recent years through the strong and coordinated response by national authorities, local health workers and partners,” said Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Africa, commending the unprecedented and immense response.

Since it was first detected in Angola in December 2015, the outbreak claimed at least 965 lives in the two countries, with thousands more suspected.

According to WHO, more than 41,000 volunteers and 8,000 vaccination teams with more than 56 non-governmental organizations undertook emergency inoculation campaigns, immunizing more than 30 million people.

The scale of response was so massive that the global stockpiles of yellow fever vaccines were exhausted several times.

See also: With 18 million doses exhausted, global stockpile of yellow fever vaccine running low

In the first six months of 2016 alone, the partners delivered more than 19 million doses of the vaccine – three times the six million doses usually put aside for an outbreak.



As the biggest emergency yellow fever vaccination campaign ever held in Africa gets underway in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), vaccines and supplies arrive in the capital Kinshasa and are loaded onto trucks to be dispatched to where they are needed. Photo: WHO/E. Kabambi

The announcement by DRC proclaiming the end of the outbreak was made yesterday. It followed a similar announcement by Angola on controlling the disease last December.

Introduction of an innovative emergency response

The first cases in this outbreak were identified on 5 December 2015 in Viana, Luanda Province, Angola. It spread to the entire country and to neighbouring DRC, where local transmission was established in March 2016.

One of the major achievements of the response was the introduction of an innovative dose-sparing strategy – using one fifth of a regular dose of the yellow fever vaccine.

This technique, approved by WHO’s global vaccine expert group, ensured protection of as many people as possible from the immediate threat of a major urban outbreak.

See also: Yellow fever: UN coordinating effort to vaccinate 14 million people

in two African countries

For instance, in the DRC capital of Kinshasa, WHO supported the Ministry of Health to vaccinate 10.7 million people using this dose-sparing strategy as a short-term measure that will provide immunity against yellow fever for at least 12 months and likely longer.

Continuing support amid new threats

In addition to supporting mass vaccination campaigns, WHO and partners continue to provide support to the two countries to strengthen disease surveillance, control the spread of mosquitoes and engage with communities so that they can protect themselves.

However, with new threats posed by climate change, increased mobility of people within and across, and the resurgence of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, risks of yellow fever epidemics are increasing.

“Yellow Fever outbreaks like the one in Angola and the DR Congo could become more frequent in many parts of the world unless coordinated measures are taken to protect people most at risk,” said Ibrahima Socé Fall, WHO Regional Emergency Director.

“Therefore we need to implement a strong preventive approach to vaccinate the population at risk across the region.”

In one such response, WHO and its partners recently developed a new strategy calling for the Elimination of Yellow fever Epidemics to strengthen global action and integrate lessons learnt from the Angola and DR Congo outbreak.