

**SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
OUTREACH AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**



PRESS CLIPPINGS

Enclosed are clippings of local and international press on the Special Court and related issues obtained by the Outreach and Public Affairs Office

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Standard Times
Tuesday, 24 May 2011

Beyond the TRC: The Case of Sierra Leone

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

(Courtesy Professor George Carew, Vice President for Academic Affairs, United Methodist University Monrovia, Liberia)

PART ONE

For quite sometime I have been brooding over the relationship between the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court since we had both in this Country. I have been considering the Link between a TRC and any Special Court as being complimentary.

And further more, whether it addressed the constitutional and political issues adequately that are so crucial in reconciliation and justice. Well Prof. George Carew, a Philosopher has thrown light on it using the case of Sierra Leone. Please read his piece in series under this column. Now Part One:

BEYOND THE TRC: THE CASE OF SIERRA LEONE

The Special Courts and TRC are often viewed as two distinct yet related projects. The Special Courts are committed to the pursuit of justice while the TRC pursues reconciliation as a means to social cohesion and political integration.

The structural implications of the TRC claim are that societal practices and habits must be brought out clearly and examined in the context of the TRC.

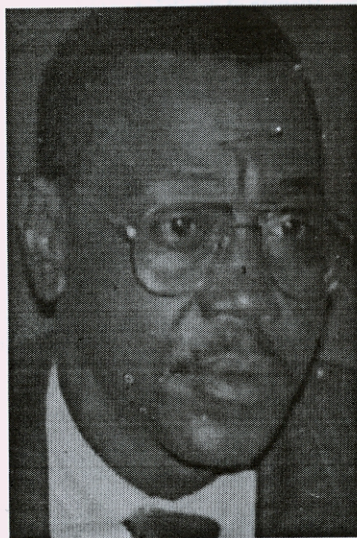
Ultimately, understanding social conflicts through its principal events and actors will permit the TRC to establish the foundation for addressing constitutional and political issues.

Thus, the justification of TRC must ultimately rest not on its perceived opposition to justice as some critics have contended but rather in the way it promotes the goal of constitutional and political reforms.

I intend to adopt the structural approach in this paper to expose the fact that the TRC has overlooked important constitutional and political issues in post conflict Sierra Leone.

Furthermore, I shall also trace the dire consequences of this failure. I shall argue in my conclusion for a novel approach that relies on Civil Society to provide resources for the resolution of the constitutional and political crisis in Sierra Leone.

But first, some clarification about the Truth and Reconciliation



IBM Kamara

Commission and its relationship to the special courts are in order.

The TRC and the Elusive Quest for Justice

The assumption that TRC does not countenance justice is somewhat misleading. The way in which this has been portrayed obscures processes and situated interests in justice which must be understood in order to resolve existing social pathologies. Problems of domination and oppression inherent in weak states go unnoticed and unredressed because the theory of TRC becomes too abstract and independent of concrete social reality. Recall the case of the TRC in South Africa. Did we get a sense from the South African TRC that the transition from apartheid to a democratic society free of racial, ethnic, religious and class tensions was the real goal? I think not.

The testimonies of individuals as to what they had experienced as individuals dominated the proceedings of the South African Model of TRC. Representatives of racial, ethnic or class groups did not step up to the TRC to testify about how the structures of racism or classism or ethnicism might continue to oppress the citizens of that state.

The distributive paradigm which framed the discourse on how to categorize offenders and victims had failed to capture the structural and political constraints on freedom. Racism and classism continue to dominate the political and social landscape in a very real sense and the political repercussions are quite evident in the current political process.

As regards the TRC, the real problem is not that it is not grounded in justice, because it is. The real problem is to find the proper balance between the need to punish offenders on the one hand, and the necessity of addressing the root causes on the other hand. Although the two projects are different in focus, it does not follow that they contradict each other. Far from being fundamentally opposed, they are actually complimentary processes. If true this will offer a way out of the dilemma:

If corrective justice is backward looking and individualist and if constitutionalism is forward looking and systemic both have predictable effect on the way that the revolutionary citizenry defines itself over time. An emphasis on corrective justice will divide the citizenry into two groups: evil doers and innocent victims. An emphasis on constitutional writing invites citizens to contribute to a definition of the new order".

A balanced approach would require a principle that would explain how "a backward looking and individualist approach and a forward looking and systemic approach could be given a unified focus."



Bishop Humper

The quest for coherence then is the reason for pursuing two legal targets simultaneously: corrective justice focuses on particular individuals while constitutionalism focuses on institutions and general principles. The role of TRC from this perspective is to lay the foundation for a new constitutional order that would restore the dignity and moral integrity of individuals. It will require the elimination eventually of structural impediments to social freedom to achieve this goal.

The major impediment to a unifying principle derives from the fact that contemporary theories of justice were rooted in a distributive paradigm.

The emphasis in a distributive system is one the so called connection between the possession of material goods and the individual's place in the social hierarchy.

It is essentially a meritocratic order in the sense that it holds that benefits and burdens should be distributed according to desert. Individuals are supposed to get what they deserve and must deserve what they get.

Thus even in the case of punishment, only those who have committed crimes 'deserve' to be punished.

But this abstract and limited view of justice as distribution, as Irish Young points out represents a failure to comprehend how state and institutional actors might be implicated in the creation and perpetuation of unjust structures and conditions that promote oppression and domination. Having assumed particular institutions and structures as

given, the logic of distribution of material goods is extended to such phenomena as power.

Power which is at the core of politics is given a positivist treatment, separating value and fact. It describes the nature of the relationship between rulers and ruled without making a value judgement about the justice of the practice.

But according to Iris Young, the issue of institutional organization cannot escape normative evaluation. "Politics in this sense concerns all aspects of institutional organization, public actions, societal practices and habits, and cultural meaning in so far as they are potentially subject to collective evaluation and decision making."

Thus, when "people say a rule or practice or cultural meaning is wrong, and should be changed, they are usually making a claim about social justice." This reformulated conception of social justice is the basis for a unified account of the activities of the Special Courts and the TRC. Since we need a structural understanding of power and domination as processes to expose the fundamental flaw in the Sierra Leone state, I shall attempt a historical analysis of the social realities that produced a failed state phenomenon.

Theorizing the Sierra Leone State

In the opening paragraph of chapter 2, ("Historical roots of the Conflict") Daniel Rothenberg poses the question: "How did a peace-loving nation become engulfed, seemingly overnight in a decade-long cycle of violence and horror?"

The mischaracterization of the independent Sierra Leone State as a peace-loving nation arguably ignored the genesis of the post colonial state. Postcolonial states were unique in the sense that in many respects they were unlike modern states in the old Westphalian order. The successor state to the colonial state inherited the structural weakness of the oppressive colonial state; consequently, it was weak, unstable and internally fragmented.

Thus, it was more suited to personal rule than democratic governance. Without a radical structural transformation, the weak post colonial state was destined to follow the path of a collapsed state.

The presumptive claim therefore that Sierra Leone was a peaceful nation state at independence can not be supported by the historical analysis which followed Rothenberg's claim. Operating from a distributive understanding of politics, the actions of individuals were not explained by reference to institutional processes but rather on the basis of the personal choices that individuals made. For example, the greed and self-centred interests of the political class is considered the driving force behind the mismanagement of the state and its resources. Thus with respect to Sierra Leone, Rothenberg concludes that:

"The TRC found that political elites consistently pursued policies of self-interest at the expense of the general good. Pervasive corruption, greed and mismanagement led people to lose confidence in the government and helped create the social unrest of the late 1980s and early 1990s". Throughout his historical survey, that spans the pre-colonial, the action of individuals were portrayed as self-motivated and interest driven. The weak state of Sierra Leone, Rothenberg concluded, was ultimately the product of the socio-economic forces that dominated the politics of Sierra Leone.

I believe this understates the case. I shall argue, first that while it is undeniable that socio-economic reasons, such as corruption, ethnic competition, poverty and illiteracy were the immediate causes of the war, the actual root causes were of a structural nature, for example, the weak postcolonial Sierra Leone state.

In making the case that the weak state status was rooted in colonialism, I call into question the claim that it was simply the product of socio-economic consequences. Second, I then explore how a structural understanding of the historical context of the state of Sierra Leone will provide valuable insights into the way power and oppression as processes pre-structured institutional domination and oppression.

80-YEAR-OLD RECALLS ATROCITIES

By John Mansaray

Eighty year old Pa. Dainka Samura has confessed of burning alive three children in Tenitalia village, Sulima Chiefdom, Koinadugu District during the war years.

He made the disclosure at the reconciliation ceremony organized by the national non-governmental organization, Fambul Tok International held at Kankaya Village in Sulima Chiefdom, Koinadugu District, Northern Sierra Leone on Thursday 19th May 2011.

"In 1998, I was captured by rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Tenitalia village and ordered to burn down the entire village. One of the houses owned by Madam Dankay was

also burnt down with three of her children inside," Pa. Dainka Samura recalled. He said he also travelled to Galawulia village where he set the entire village ablaze. After this revelation, Pa. Samura sprawled on the ground and pleaded to the people for for-

giveness.

One of the victims, Madam Dankay said she has forgiven Pa. Samura for the crimes committed because failure to forgive the perpetrator would not bring back

the lives of her children.

She also called on the entire chiefdom people to forgive Pa. Samura, now one of their elders who was forced to commit atrocities against his wish. Communications Officer of Fambul Tok Interna-

tional, Solomon Yarjoh expressed thanks and appreciation to the people of Sulima Chiefdom and other communities where Fambul Tok is working relentlessly to reconcile the people.

He also commended the various communities for their understanding and willingness to confess in the interest of peace and appealed to all to continue to accept one another.

Why not give some of Gaddafi's held money to Sierra Leone and Liberia?

Posted by: Kofi Akosah-Sarpong



Gadhafi - Give Sierra Leone and Liberia held money

US Congressman Brad Sherman (Democrat, California) thinks in the wake of NATO's expensive operations in Libya to contain Muammar Gaddafi's attempts to kill protestors and the budget battle on Capitol Hill, the seized Gaddafi money, totaling over US\$100 billion, should be used to pay for the Libyan no fly zone operations. That makes sense because of the humanitarian nature of the operations. What also makes sense, humanly, are some Sierra Leoneans and Liberians at home and abroad campaigning for some of Gaddafi's apprehended money be given to their struggling country as mandated by the United Nations Special Court for Sierra Leone. Short of charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes the UN Special Court for Sierra Leone authorized Gaddafi to pay compensations for the victims of the civil war some of whom were murdered, raped, maimed and mutilated. Over a million Sierra Leoneans and Liberian were killed as a result of the Gaddafi induced war. Gaddafi did train, finance and encourage the deadly rebel groups Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

Swinging between sanity and insanity, Gaddafi came to the agonizing conclusion that he has caused irreparable damages to some Africans and decided to give some sort of financial aid. Gibril Koroma, the Sierra Leonean publisher of the Vancouver, British Columbia based thepatrioticvanguard.com, making the case for Sierra Leonean victims wrote that, "A couple of years ago, Gaddafi realized he had hurt Africa too much and he started what he may have considered a reconciliation process by giving away millions of dollars in raw cash and all sorts of other gifts like cars and tractors to African leaders. He has also been financing the United States of Africa project scheduled to kick off by 2017." But the real victims of Gaddafi's atrocities – amputations, murders, raping, maiming and mutilations – the ordinary, innocent Sierra Leoneans and Liberians did not receive any of what Gibril Koroma indicated. Now is the time for them to get their compensations direct from Gaddafi's looted billions. Their case is as reasonable and human as US Congressman Brad Sherman's arguments for NATO.

The Sierra Leonean journalist and academic Aroun Rashid Deen, currently a doctoral candidate at New York University, in making the case for Gaddafi to pay compensation to Sierra Leonean and Liberian fatalities, argued that “Muammar Gaddafi was the mastermind and key financier of the brutal war that left hundreds of thousands dead in Sierra Leone in West Africa in the 1990s. The war would not have happened in the first place had it not been for the desire of the Libyan leader to punish the government of Sierra Leone for what he regarded as its siding with the West in the 1980’s when Gaddafi was at loggerhead with particularly the United States and Britain. “It was also part of Gaddafi’s broader agenda including his geopolitical ambition to destabilize much of West Africa and establish satellite states in the region to be headed by puppet regimes that will be doing his biddings. The decade-long war ripped Sierra Leone apart. Thousands of its victims, whose arms and limbs were chopped off by rebels, were reduced to paupers, roaming the streets as beggars in Freetown and other cities. Children as young as a day old were also among those whose arms and limbs were hacked off by Gaddafi’s rebels. Pregnant women, too, were disemboweled with delight in their display of ghastly brutality.”

Jesmed F. Suma, of the US-based Sierra Leone Policy Watch, a policy think tank and civic engagement group, argues insightfully that, “In 2008, in an unprecedented act of contrition, Italy agreed to pay reparation of US\$5 billion to Libya for Rome’s past injustices for 30 years as colonial master over Libya in the early years of the last century. Also in 2008 Libya was ordered to pay US\$6 billion to the victims on-board the French Aircraft UTA Flight 772 for Libya’s role in the bombing of the flight over Niger in 1989. In addition Libya agreed to also pay US\$1 million to each of the other 170 non-American victims. “Libya also paid the US Govt. US\$1.5 billion for Libya’s role in the Lockerbie Bombing that took the life of 270 victims and for the Berlin Disco Bombing that killed 3 and wounded 200. Now with regards to Sierra Leone and Liberia, Gaddafi sponsored a rebellion that killed thousands of poor, innocent men, women and children. These victims deserve the same justice as the victims of the Lockerbie bombing or the Libyan victims of Italian injustice.”

If Gaddafi has paid all these sums of money for his evil schemes, the time has come, through African and global institutions, for him to do same to the over million Sierra Leoneans and Liberians either slaughtered, raped, or maimed. The Sierra Leone government, the diaspora Sierra Leonean lobby, the Mano River Union, the transnational African lobby, the Economic Community of West African States, regional giant Nigeria, the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union, and the African Development Bank, among others, should campaign for Sierra Leone and Liberia to get some of the billions of dollars seized from Gaddafi for the damages he brought upon these countries.

HardNews

Tuesday, 24 May 2011

<http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2011/05/3976>

Inside the Heart of Blood Diamonds



*Little sparks of optimism for a ravaged childhood replete with hunger and a brutalised past. Means a lot where hope and happiness is always in short supply
Meha Dixit Koidu (Sierra Leone)*

Jagged roads, ocher sand, dense patches of lush green, and some charred huts and houses -- charred from the devastation caused during the war. This is Koidu Town in Kono district, Sierra Leone, known for its 'blood diamonds' which fuelled and sustained the brutish, genocidal armed conflict in Sierra Leone (1991-2002). During the conflict, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and Civil Defense Force (CDF) forcibly recruited children. Since armed groups controlled virtually all the key diamond mines in the country during the final years of the conflict, they employed a number of children to toil in these mines.

While I was based in the capital of Sierra Leone, Freetown, I travelled to a number of districts including Kono to interact with former child soldiers to learn about their experiences during the war and their plight today. Many ex-child combatants are still facing hardships while others have reintegrated well in the society. Some were accepted by their families and communities while others were abandoned due to fear and stigma. Child soldiers who have reintegrated into society are now taxi drivers, *okada* (bike) riders, masons, musicians, carpenters, tailors, plumbers. Some are students, while youngsters like Bashiru are pursuing higher education. During March 1991, the RUF marched into Sierra Leone from Liberia to fight against the corrupt government. It soon degenerated into a ruthless force creating havoc across the country. The RUF was led by Foday Sankoh, a disgruntled former Sierra Leone Army (SLA) corporal. Sankoh received training in Gaddafi's Libya and was supported by Liberia's corrupt dictator Charles Taylor.

In the traumatic aftermath of the conflict, Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration (DDR) programmes were launched to reintegrate former combatants. Unlike in El Salvador, Mozambique and some other DDR schemes in early 1990s,

child soldiers were officially included in the process in Sierra Leone. Child combatants who entered the DDR programme were small in number compared with the actual estimates of child soldiers, while girl soldiers were marginalised. While disarmament was successful, demobilisation and reintegration programmes had too many shortcomings -- skills training programme mostly lasted few months, reintegration period was short-lived, and there were no monitoring mechanisms to assess ex-child combatants' post conflict situation. However, when compared with Mozambique (early 1990s), El Salvador (early 1990s), Angola (mid 1990s & 2002), the 'rehab scene' in Sierra Leone made tremendous progress. What is striking about in post conflict Sierra Leone is the resilience of ex-combatants, ex-child soldiers and local communities. One such heart-wrenching but inspirational story from Kono is that of Aminata and her grandmother.

In 1998, Aminata 10, (name changed) was captured by the RUF in Kono district. She was made to cook, clean, fetch water and food. She was also given a gun but the gun was too heavy for her to handle. Her food and tea were often spiked with drugs. She was frequently gang-raped and at 13 she became pregnant. Soon, her baby died.

In 2002, when the civil war ended, she went through DDR in Kono. Aminata lost her parents during the war. Her grandmother, who was alive, accepted her. This was quite heartening since many ex-girl soldiers were abandoned by their families and communities due to the stigma of being associated with armed groups or carrying a child of armed militias without wedlock. Through DDR Aminata learnt soap making skills for one year and six months. However, she was not given any stipend which former child soldiers were entitled to during the skills training programme. After the training, although she received a certificate, she was not given a soap making kit. And worst of all, no help was provided to her in getting a job. This is what majority of over 70 ex-child soldiers interviewed told this reporter.

Aminata said, 'She had to sell her suit to buy caustic soda and palm oil to make soaps.' However, she no longer engages in soap making since palm oil is expensive. This clearly reflects how some of the programmes offered by DDR were not sustainable. But, Aminata says she is happy with DDR because now she is out of "that hellish, violent, military life" and has also learnt a new skill.

Little sparks of optimism for a ravaged childhood replete with hunger and a brutalised past. Means a lot where hope and happiness is always in short supply.

The New Times (Kigali)

Tuesday, 24 May 2011

Rwanda: ICTR Holds Special Kabuga Deposition Case

Gashegu Muramira

Arusha — The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, yesterday, began conducting special deposition proceedings in the case of Genocide fugitive Félicien Kabuga.

Kabuga, commonly referred to as the 'financier' of the 1994 against the Tutsi, is charged with eleven counts.

They include; conspiracy to commit Genocide, Genocide, Gomplicity in genocide, Direct and Public Incitement to Commit Genocide.

Others are; Crimes against Humanity (Murder, Extermination, Rape, Persecution, Inhumane acts) and Serious Violations of Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II.

The proceedings follow a successful application by the Prosecution earlier this year for the taking of the disposition, seeking to safeguard evidence against Kabuga and two others still at large; former Minister of Defence Augustin Bizimana and Major Protais Mpiranya, former Commander of the Presidential Guard.

This is in pursuant to Rule 71 bis of the Rules of Procedure and Evidence.

"The process is designed to ensure that the evidence against the accused is preserved and that the continued evasion of justice by the fugitives does not, in the event of unavailability of the witnesses, erode the ability of the prosecution to establish the case against the accused when they are eventually arrested and brought to trial," ICTR Prosecutor Hassan Bubacar Jallow told reporters yesterday.

The accused is represented by Duty Counsel, Bahame Nyanduga, who was appointed by the ICTR Registrar.

Hirondelle News Agency

Monday, 23 May 2011

Witness alleges Hutu and Tutsi students manned roadblocks

Martin Mukeshimana, former student at the National University of Rwanda, Butare campus Monday alleged before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) that students from both ethnic groups, Hutus and Tutsis participated in manning roadblocks and night patrols to ensure security at the university in April 1994.

“Everybody without ethnic discrimination of Hutus or Tutsis participated in the night patrols and control of two roadblocks erected within the University campus,” Mukeshimana told the Chamber led by Judge Lee Muthoga in defence of former Rwandan military officer, Idelphonse Nizeyimana.

Led in his examination in-chief by the accused defence Counsel, John Philpot, the fifteenth defence witness told the court that students were compelled to run the roadblocks and night patrols in turn following the deterioration of the security at the university after the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana on April 6, 1994.

He went on explaining that after the tragic event the number of students in the campus including others from neighboring secondary schools sought refuge at the University, prompting the erection of the roadblocks to check if the people flocking into the campus were real students or not.

Part of the indictment states that from April 7 until mid July, 1994, Captain Nizeyimana ordered and instigated soldiers from various military camps in Butare prefecture to construct and man roadblocks including those near the entrance of Butare University for the purpose of identifying and killing Tutsi civilians.

However during cross examination by the prosecution Counsel, Kristen Gray, the witness denied that he knew heard or met the defendant before and after the genocide.

“I never knew, heard or met Captain Nizeyimana before or during genocide in Butare,” he said.

The defence case continues Tuesday.

Earlier another former student at Butare University, Martin Mutarutinya also testified in the case but did not mention the accused in his examination in-chief.

The defendant is facing six charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes including extermination, murder and rape.

NI/FK/GF

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Ottawa Citizen
Monday, 23 May 2011

Female Nobel laureates launch campaign against rape as a weapon of war

By Kelly Patterson



A 10-year-old girl who was raped twice in the last 10 days leans against a wall while being admitted at a clinic at a Congolese non-government organization on November 24, 2008 in Goma. The girl was first raped by several soldiers reportedly from the CNDP when fighting broke out between the rebel group and the Congolese army around November 14. After that attack she managed to walk to the provincial capital city of Goma where she had no one to stay with. While roaming the streets she was assaulted by two men and raped again. After being found bleeding in a street by another woman she was brought to the centre. Women and girls in eastern Congo's North Kivu province are once again suffering increasing levels of sexual violence amid renewed conflict, instability and widespread displacement of civilians.

Rape has been used as a weapon of war throughout eastern Congo for years.

Photograph by: ROBERTO SCHMIDT, AFP/Getty Images

'My family and I were all sleeping when the soldiers arrived. They tied my husband's hands behind his back and then they took turns raping me. Afterward ... they killed him. I spent three weeks in the forest until one night I was able to escape. When I arrived home, I discovered that my little child was dead.'

— Panzi Hospital patient, Democratic Republic of Congo

(Testimonial from Harvard Humanitarian Initiative report, *Now the World Is Without Me*, 2010)

This is the new face of war: Militias going on house-to-house rape campaigns; girls as young as five and women as old as 80 shot in the genitals, or mutilated with razor blades; soldiers targeting whole villages for violation.

And as the scale of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo reaches surreal proportions — more than 1,150 rapes a day, by one account — many warn that sexual terrorism is spiralling out of control as the nature of warfare changes from the clash of national armies to savage internal conflicts in which women and children have become prime targets. Now sex attacks — pouring melted rubber into women's vaginas, raping children in front of their parents — have become a core military strategy, not only in the Congo, but in conflicts around the world, from Sudan to Burma to Colombia.

That is the message three Nobel Peace Prize winners will be bringing when they touch down in Ottawa this weekend — the first time such a delegation has come to Canada. Members of a group called the Nobel Women's Initiative, they are here to launch an international conference on the issue, followed by a meeting to which they have invited all three party leaders, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

"We all have a responsibility to do more in the face of this horrific violence against women," says U.S. laureate Jody Williams, who won the peace prize after spearheading the 1997 ban on landmines.

“We hope that this conference brings us one step closer to a global campaign” against sexual violence in conflict zones, she says, adding that she hopes Canada will step up as a leader, as it did in the landmine campaign.

“Every day, women around the world are being raped in war zones,” says Liz Bernstein, director of the Nobel Women’s Initiative, which was founded by all the women who now hold the peace prize to lend support to women’s groups around the world. Rape is used to terrorize communities and “tear the fabric of society apart,” says Bernstein.

The laureates want to end the culture of impunity around sexual violence; they want better protection in place for women and children; they want more medical and legal services for survivors and improved systems to track incidents.

They define the issue broadly, to include regions still in turmoil even after the fighting is over, or where the rule of law has broken down, leaving women vulnerable — in Haiti after the earthquake, for example, or in refugee camps. The group also defines sexual violence broadly, to include any forced sexual activity, including trafficking, and notes that men and boys are also sometimes targeted.

Williams will be joined by human-rights defender Shirin Ebadi of Iran and anti-violence advocate Mairead Maguire of Northern Ireland. The three remaining laureates — Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai, indigenous-rights activist Rigoberta Menchu Tum of Guatemala, and peace activist Betty Williams of Northern Ireland — could not attend personally, but will support the effort from their home countries.

A seventh laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, is an honorary member of the group, her participation limited until recently by her house arrest in her native Burma. She has sent a video message, to be aired when the conference opens Monday in Montebello.

The three-day event brings together more than 120 policy-makers, academics and activists. Although its headquarters are in Ottawa, this the first time the Nobel group has held a conference in Canada.

Despite worldwide condemnation of mass rapes in both Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the trend toward targeting women has continued, prompting Maj.-Gen. Patrick Cammaert, former UN division chief for the eastern Congo, to remark that now “it is perhaps more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict.”

It is a trend Aung San Suu Kyi has seen in her own country: In her video, she addresses for the first time the use of rape as a weapon of terror.

“Rape is used in my country as a weapon against those who only want to live in peace, who only want to assert their basic human rights,” says a sombre but steady-voiced Suu Kyi. “It is used as a weapon by armed forces to intimidate the ethnic nationalities and to divide our country.”

It’s a scourge many other nations face, she adds: “We want all wounds to be healed, not just in my country but in all other places where wounds have been deep.”

Kenyan laureate Wangari Maathai has also seen the devastating effects of sexual violence: When Kenya was thrown into turmoil following the 2007-2008 elections, “sexual violence became the preferred weapon of choice against those who were perceived as enemies,” she recalls.

Social taboos mean that sexual violence remains a silent, unspeakable act: “It is a crime that is not discussed. It is almost taken as something that has to happen,” she says. To make matters worse, communities often shun the survivors, leaving them alone to face HIV, pregnancy, injuries and other consequences of sex attacks.

Despite a spate of UN resolutions, many nations ignore the problem. “There is a tendency to trivialize women’s concerns,” and perpetrators are often not punished, she says.

As many as 3,000 women were raped in postelection attacks, according to the Kenyan Federation of Women Lawyers.

“It was horrific, especially in a country where you also have HIV-AIDS,” Maathai recalls. To this day, she adds, many of the survivors, thousands of them still in relief camps, remain in a state of shock: “Sometimes you meet people you know, and it’s like they have never seen you before. ... They are still in another world. You can see their pain.”

Sexual violence in times of war or turmoil is not new: “Rape has been a part of war for as long as wars have been recorded,” notes Valerie Oosterveld, a law professor at the University of Western Ontario and an expert on war crimes.

What has changed, she says, is the nature of war itself: “It used to be two armies fighting each other, facing off on a field,” away from the civilian population. But since the 1970s, “most wars are now internal armed conflicts, not one country against another country’s army.”

In other words, the targets are now civilians, and “this has made rape a very useful form of war, unfortunately,” says Oosterveld, a former Canadian government lawyer specializing in the International Criminal Court, as well as the postwar tribunals for Rwanda and Yugoslavia.

“It has very powerful psychological impacts,” such as humiliating the men in a community when they can’t defend their women and children, she observes. As bearers of the next generation, women are powerful symbols not only of a family’s honour, but also of the future of society as a whole: In defiling them, attackers tear the soul out of the community, researchers such as German sociologist Ruth Seifert have argued.

The Nobel group also points to other strategic uses of sexual violence: The military may use it to punish communities suspected of supporting rebels, as in Colombia and Burma. Rape is used as a form of torture, to extract information. Gang rapes are used to instil a bond among fighters.

Sexual terrorism can be used to drive villagers off resource-rich land, as in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Congo.

And of course, rape can be used as a form of genocide, to change the ethnic makeup of an area, as in Bosnia and Kosovo.

While there were instances of mass sex attacks before this transformation, such as the 1937 Rape of Nanking, the first incident to be internationally recognized as having a strategic military goal was a campaign targeting Muslim Bengali women during Bangladesh’s 1971 war of independence, according the Oslo-based International Peace Research Institute (PRIO).

The practice quickly gained momentum, reaching an unprecedented scale of depravity in the 1990s as a tool for genocide, from the “rape camps” of the former Yugoslavia to the surreal savagery of Rwanda.

The numbers are staggering: As many as 50,000 women raped in Bosnia. From 250,000 to 500,000 in Rwanda. More than 60,000 in Sierra Leone.

In the Darfur conflict, 40 per cent of women interviewed by Physicians for Human Rights said they had been raped; the rate is estimated to be close to 100 per cent for women in relief camps.

Last week, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court announced an investigation into charges that Libyan forces were using sex-enhancement drugs to gang-rape female rebels, CNN reported.

But nowhere is the picture more shocking than in the DRC. One hospital reported more than 350 cases a year of fistula, an injury from rape with sharp objects that tears the wall between the vagina and the rectum and leaves the victims incontinent, adding devastating health and social consequences to the trauma of rape.

The UN has estimated at least 200,000 women have been raped in eastern Congo since 1996, but under-reporting means this number may be 10 to 20 times higher — as high as 260,000 incidents in 2009 alone, a 2011 UNESCO report says.

Chillingly, prolonged exposure to sex attacks by armed groups may have created a “normalization of rape” in civilian society, warns a study published last year by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, a think-tank specializing in relief strategies. It notes a 1,733-per-cent jump in civilian rapes from 2004 to 2008 in the DRC’s South Kivu province.

Last week, a new study put the countrywide incidence of rape, including domestic violence, at more than 400,000 — in one year. Published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, the study found more than 1,150 women were raped every day — a rate of 48 per hour.

Michael VanRooyen, director of the Harvard agency, commented that “rape in the DRC has metastasized amid a climate of impunity, and has emerged as one of the great human crises of our time.”

The world has not sat by, entirely indifferent: The UN has responded, at least on paper, strongly and with increasing urgency to the growing use of sexual violence.

In 2000, it passed the first Security Council resolution to address the impact of war on women. As tragedies continued to unfold, the declarations came thick and fast — statements by the secretary general in 2004 and again in 2005; more Security Council resolutions in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

Last year, the UN appointed a Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and 24 countries, including Canada, have answered the UN’s call for national action plans on the issue.

Peacekeeping forces have learned that even simple steps such as patrolling when women are fetching water or firewood are highly effective; some national police and peacekeepers undergo special training to learn how to address sexual violence.

Meanwhile, some perpetrators are being brought to justice.

One acclaimed program sends “mobile justice courts” to remote areas of the DRC to try sexual-violence cases. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is pursuing cases that include sex-crimes allegations, and as of 2009, more than 50 charges had been laid under national laws in 13 European countries, according to Jayne Stoyles of the Canadian Centre for International Justice, an Ottawa-based charity that helps survivors of human-rights abuses seek justice.

Canada itself had a breakthrough in 2009, when Rwandan Désiré Munyaneza was convicted of war crimes, including rape, for his part in the 1994 genocide; he was the first person to be charged under Canada’s Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Act.

But such progress seems pallid against the horrors playing out in places like the DRC. The ICC has charged only 12 people with sexual-violence crimes so far, Oosterveld says. And the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has charged only 58 people with sex crimes; the tribunal for Rwanda, only 35, as of 2010, according to PRIO.

“The use of rape as a political tool is becoming all too common. ... There need to be voices on this issue that are compelling and that are listened to,” says Lloyd Axworthy, who helped spearhead the creation of the ICC, and entrench the UN’s policy on the protection of civilians, as Canada’s foreign affairs minister in the 1990s.

More importantly, he adds, those voices “need to be backed up by some action so that the psychotic tyrants and crazies who are doing this kind of stuff don’t think they can get away with it any more.”

As the revolution in warfare unfolds, sexual violence can no longer be seen only as a human-rights violation, the Nobel laureates say.

It is, they write, no less than “a threat to international peace and security,” warning that efforts at reconciliation will fail unless the issue is tackled head-on, not just by rights groups, but by governments and the military as well.

“There needs to be more co-ordination around the world to ensure that we can build political will and momentum,” says Jody Williams.

Beyond practical measures such as better peacekeeping measures, the Nobel group wants more fundamental changes: measures to empower survivors, to change social attitudes and eliminate the stigma attached to sexual violence.

Ultimately, Aung San Suu Kyi says in her video message, “we have to start by changing the minds of men and women all over the world — men that they may not think of women as ready victims, and women also that they may not think of themselves as helpless victims. ... We must make sure our women are empowered and that our men are educated.”

It’s a sea-change that doesn’t just mean more courtrooms and more peacekeepers, Suu Kyi suggests. You can take away the guns; you can sign treaties and make solemn declarations. But you won’t have peace on the ground until it lives inside all those involved: “Violence” she says, “starts in the mind.”

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