

Denis Mukwege: "Rape is a weapon that dehumanises women"



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For years Denis Mukwege, this year's Sakharov Prize laureate, has been helping the victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo despite threats and his family being attacked. The gynaecologist will be honoured for his work by the Parliament during an award ceremony on Wednesday 26 November in plenary. Read our interview with him and follow the event live.

How will the prize influence your work?

We feel that the European Parliament has understood women's difficult situation during conflicts. We hope to find solutions to stop rape being used as a weapon of war, sometimes even as a war strategy.

Like many other human rights defenders, you are an example of perseverance in very difficult circumstances. What keeps you going? Was there ever an occasion when you considered giving up?

Two years ago I was attacked at home. My security guard was killed, my children were taken hostage, and it's true that at that moment I thought that it was too difficult and that I had to take into account my family responsibilities. I left Congo, but the strength of these women and their willingness to fight made me return very quickly.

Women and girls are victims of sexual violence in many of the today's conflicts, from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Syria. What can we do to protect women and girls?

Every one of us has to understand that rape is not about a sexual act against someone's will. In a conflict environment, rape is used as a weapon of humiliation, a weapon that dehumanises women. Raping a woman or a child in front of everybody and destroying their genital organs is nothing sexual. It's a humiliation, a vicious destruction.

Rape has the same or even bigger consequences than classical weapons. First, it causes the massive displacement of population. Second, as with all classical weapons, rape destroys the enemy's demographics. Some of these women will not be able to have more children. And even if they can, their fertility is very low. Third, its consequences can pass through generations. These women will continue to live and contaminate people in the village, if infected with a sexual transmitted disease, or can also later transmit the disease to their children. And the ones who get pregnant will have children without filiation, which also contributes to the destruction of social tissue.

The international community has drawn a red line concerning the use of chemical, nuclear or biological weapons. We - men and women - need to demand that red line for rape: a weapon that is cheap, accessible, but very destructive.

[Find out what the Parliament does to fight gender inequality.](#)

Further information

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