

Missing

Jane MacKay Wright

Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo

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What would you do if armed government soldiers came into your home, greeted you formally, and announced they were taking your twelve-year old daughter? She would be a “military wife,” available for sex, cooking, washing, carrying heavy goods, and other chores that soldiers won’t do.

This happened last week to families of two schoolgirls in Kashenda village, where a Christian Peacekeeper Team (CPT) visited with its partner Groupe Martin Luther King. The girls are friends: one in the last grade of primary school, the other in the first year of secondary school. Their families are heartbroken. Their parents are afraid to leave their homes. But everyone lives in fear in Kashenda.

The village is located at the bottom of green mountains above Lake Kivu. It’s near Minova, in Masisi territory, North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Last year CPTs could not use the road to Minova because of fighting between government forces, rebel CNDP armies, and seven other militias. This year CPTs saw government soldiers throughout the area. Villagers pointed out their camps on ridges looking down on Kashenda. Rebels and other militias assemble in the hills farther out, just out of sight. Civilians have been at risk for more than ten years in this area. Farmers cannot go to their fields without being shot. Women are attacked and raped if they wander far from the village to gather firewood. And children are taken to be soldiers or ‘wives’.

A woman told CPT that two fourteen year olds were walking down the main road in Kashenda, in the daytime about mid-afternoon, when rebels appeared and marched them up into the hills to be trained as soldiers. CPTs met a young university student that government military threatened to rape. She is so afraid that she has not left her home for days. Her family cannot afford to move her to Goma to continue her studies. Villagers told CPT that in the past a spokesperson had complained on their behalf to two government commanders. Officials jailed the spokesperson.

After much encouragement, last week the families of the two schoolgirls went with neighbours to the local police. Everyone knows the soldiers who took away their children. They know the regiment. They know the commander’s name. However the police told them to go away. There are strict divisions between government military and local police. Villagers feel powerless against poorly paid and poorly disciplined soldiers who have orders from Kinshasa, (DRC’s capital city) to deploy to eastern parts of the country.

Children are missing. “The problem is war”, say the Kashenda villagers, and war is too big for them to solve. They ask us to tell our governments to get the foreign soldiers out of the Congo. “Tell Rwanda to take back its soldiers. Tell the international community to stop encouraging the chaos, to stop stripping the Congo of its minerals.” They want to live. They want their children back.

Jane MacKay Wright, Toronto Monthly Meeting

The Struggle for Justice in Eastern Congo

Eric Schiller

There is a small group of human rights defenders in Eastern Congo whose steadfastness and courage is almost beyond human comprehension. For 17 long years, without fear or favour, Heritiers de la Justice (Heirs of Justice -HJ- www.heritiers.org) in Bukavu, has been bravely speaking out for the oppressed and the marginalized. Three years ago the director of HJ, Pascal Kabungulu, was murdered in his home.

In May 2003 after Pascal published a report on the RCD-Goma’s pillaging of Kivu’s mineral resources, Lt. Col T. Ilunga, a former RCD-Goma member now integrated into the DR Congo army, publicly issued a death threat against Pascal Kabungulu. A statement by one of Pascal’s accused killers reads: “Today is your last day. You think you’re invincible because of what you write and say in the newspapers and on radio. We’re fed up with you journalists and human rights activists, who think you can change the world.”

In April 2005 Pascal Kabungulu was killed in his home in front of his wife and children. With help from