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Defending dignity.
Fighting poverty.

Voices Against Violence



CARE International/2009/Jenny Matthews

CARE International is one of the world's largest aid agencies, working in over 70 countries around the world, tackling poverty and injustice. Across five continents, CARE's work has an impact on over 59 million people a year.

Working on the ground is vital but not enough in itself. We campaign at an international level to change the systems that keep millions of people teetering on the edge of survival.

CARE's work to tackle violence against women

CARE runs projects in more than 20 countries that focus on reducing and mitigating gender-based violence. In dozens more countries, combating violence is a cross-cutting theme, particularly in maternal health, education and HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment. Providing access to counselling services, support and care through women's savings and loans groups, is one way that we make women aware of their rights and help them find the support they need.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence

The 16 Days of Activism run from International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November) to International Human Rights Day, and mark an important moment in the calendar of those across the globe campaigning for an end to violence.

For women living in conflict zones, who are under constant threat of violence, it can be almost impossible to speak out, and be listened to by the outside world. This press briefing brings together the voices of women from conflicts ranging from Afghanistan to Congo, who speak bravely and frankly about their experiences.

Contacts

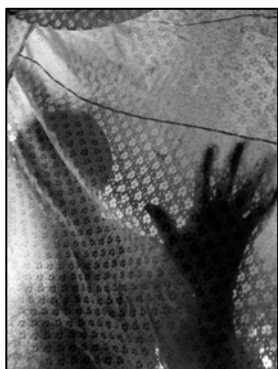
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Voices Against Violence

A Voice from Kenya



*The following is a first-hand account of the post-election violence written by a beneficiary of CARE's **Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence** project. The author has requested anonymity.*

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I am a resident of Kibera where, until recently, I lived with my husband and 10 children. Violence began in my community on the morning of December 30, 2007 following the Kenya national election. On this date young men roamed through my community, harassing people with knives and stones. When this began I ran to a friend's house to hide and left my children there to keep them safe. In the evening I decided to go back to my house with my two daughters. When I was at home that evening a group of armed General Service Unit (GSU) men knocked on my door, which I hesitated to open. I eventually opened the door, hoping the men would protect us against the rowdy youth because my husband was not home to protect us. When the men entered they searched the house for any hidden weapons, but could not find any. Then one of the men demanded that I remove my clothes, while the other two men harassed my daughters. Before I could resist, I was knocked down on the floor and raped while my daughters were assaulted.

Afterwards, I was not able to get to a health facility or get medical care for two days. When I finally got to the hospital I was asked to return in two weeks for treatment. When I returned I was given a blood test and found HIV-positive. After getting this news I reported it to the local chief who gave me a letter to help me present the case to the nearest police station. When I later reported the case at Kilimani police station, they dismissed me and told me that they didn't handle such cases. After discovering my HIV-positive status my husband accused me of giving my body to the police and left without returning.

I was eventually admitted to the Mbagathi Hospital for 20 days, where I began antiretroviral treatments. At this point I gained some hope because CARE provided me counseling and helped me gain the confidence to openly discuss my ordeal with the Commission Investigating Post-election Violence (CIPEV). After gaining this confidence, I encouraged other women to share their experiences so that we can provide moral support to each other.

It has been hard to identify the General Service Unit (GSU) man who abused me, making it difficult to pursue justice. My life has not been the same since my ordeal, so I hope that CARE will continue to help me and other victims get access to counseling and legal aid. This is so important because many police are still abusing women and going unpunished, while women and children continue to suffer.

Voices Against Violence

A Voice from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)



Marie-Claire Malonga is a beneficiary of CARE's Wakinamama credit savings and loans scheme in Eastern DRC. Marie-Claire's testimony is a graphic account and contains details which may be upsetting.

© CARE / Mark Philips

"Some rapists have asked for forgiveness, the others are dead. I am a Christian and I have forgiven."

My name is Marie-Claire, I am 50 years old and am married with 9 children. I'm from Alunguli Village, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Mai Mai (a rebel group) came to our village, firing gunshots everywhere. They surrounded our house and demanded we open the door. Then they took my husband, me and my children. They said they were going to kill my husband. They undressed him, took his penis in their hands and began to twist it around.

I was crying and they forced me to lie down on the floor, and took my clothes off. Four men took it in turns to have sex with me.

My daughter's husband was really angry and tried to fight back, but they put a knife in his chest and killed him.

They then raped me again with a stick, and raped my children, in front of my son-in-law's dead body.

If this wasn't enough for our family to deal with, the Mai Mai then took my daughter with them, and kept her in the forest for two years. When she finally came home, she had two children fathered by a rebel.

We're trying to pick up the pieces. Now I have to provide for all my children and grandchildren. Thanks to CARE's savings and loans scheme I can pay the school fees. I am gaining strength. I haven't got quite as many financial worries as I used to although it is still very difficult to get by. I haven't got a house.

I am starting to move on, I've been able to talk to other women about my experiences and am starting to feel better. My desire is to have a house, buy a cow, and to make sure that my children and grandchildren go to school. It's not too much to ask is it?

Voices Against Violence

Voices from Afghanistan



Amber Meikle, a member of CARE's press team, visited Afghanistan to meet widows who have been affected by violence. Here she, and they, speak out.

© CARE/Jenny Matthews

District 7 is one of the poorest parts of Kabul, and I'm here to visit the Sadat women's group – Sadat means Lucky. As I enter a house, a young woman is brandishing a poster of a battered woman that says 'the lady that suffers violence is like a tree that is broken in two'. At that the ladies burst into discussion, each eager to share their experience of violence.

Narges (widow, Kabul): "During the time of the Taliban, a lot of girls were married by force. The Taliban would take them. I was afraid that the Taliban would take my daughter. So when she was small I arranged an engagement to my sister in laws son. I thought this would protect her. Five years ago she was in school and said she wanted to continue to study. This was possible now that the Taliban had gone. But she was engaged to her cousin who did not believe girls should be educated. I wanted her to honour the arrangement. But when I came to this group we discussed the issue. I realised that it was her right to go to school and not to be forced into marriage. Eventually I agreed that she should not marry into this family".

Shabobo (widow, Kabul): "During the war I lost my husband who was hit by a rocket. My children were 2 and 1 and I was pregnant. Since then I was the victim of a lot of violence from his family. They did not want to give me my inheritance, so they would beat me.

Without this group I would not have been able to fight. I would not have known that I could fight. 3 months ago I did receive my inheritance! Many women. Like me. Spend all their time in the home and do not know these things.

Women are not aware of the rights, or how they can get justice, they do not know the systems or how to communicate with them. In this room we are lucky. Now we have justice for ourselves, we will do what we can for other women and share our knowledge and experience."

Maria (widow, Kabul): "My husband died shortly after our wedding. I lived with his brother who was very cruel. I have two daughters. And he always beat us. He demanded that I marry him as is often the case in Afghan culture. But I refused to marry by force, because I know that a widow is free, and she has rights. I can decide my own life!"

A Voice from Somalia



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Hawo Nagash has refused to have her daughters circumcised in line with Somali tradition. The marriage between Hawo's grandfather, an Eritrean, and a Somali, rendered the family "tribeless", causing much suffering, especially during times of war. Hawo lives in a refugee camp in Kenya, after fleeing conflict in Somalia.

"My biggest fear is that somebody will take my daughters and circumcise them"

I have three daughters. In 2002, I told my husband I was not prepared to have them circumcised, as is the tradition of all Somali families. When my husband's mother heard, she complained and tried to force my husband to circumcise them when I was not around.

My sisters also complained, saying it was going to bring stigma to my family. When I refused, my mother-in-law forced her son to divorce me. He no longer comes to visit his daughters and gives us no support. He has a new wife.

My decision is making life hard in the camp, but I will never go back on it. I have seen the terrible health problems that girls and women suffer who have been circumcised. There is terrible pain that often lasts a lifetime, and women have terrible problems giving birth.

The type of FGM practised here is full infibulation at about five to seven years old. As a mother I could never do that to my children. I love them too much. The girls are often bullied in school and the younger twins, who are 11, have both been badly beaten. One suffers from partial deafness as the injury affected her eardrum. Children shout at them, saying they are dirty.

I was working as a counsellor for CARE International in the camp on women's issues, but I have had to stop to look after my children. They were suffering so much bullying and I now have to walk them to and from school.

I try to make other women realise the dangers of what they do to their children, but there are very few women who have had the courage to do what I have done. I think it is because I have lived with discrimination my whole life that I don't care, as long as my daughters don't have to suffer the physical and emotional pain of circumcision.

My hope is to continue trying to make women aware of their rights ... My biggest fear is that someone from my family will take my daughters one night and try to circumcise them. I have no protection and no man in my life to protect us.