**500 Rapes In DR Congo As The United Nations Watches**

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*http://www.neontommy.com/news/2010/09/congo-rapes-reach-500-due-failed-un-attempts*

United Nations troops on patrol in DC Congo (Photo Courtesy UN)On Tuesday the United Nations reported that there have been more than 500 systematic rapes in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since late July. This toll is more than double the previous report released less than a week ago.

U.N. Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Atul Khare embarked on a fact-finding mission and found that at least 267 rapes and sexual attacks occurred in the country’s eastern region. These findings are in addition to 242 rapes earlier reported in the village of Luvungi that has a population of 2,200 and is located 20 miles (a half-hour drive) away from a U.N. peacekeepers camp.

“While the primary responsibility for protection of civilians lies with the state, its national army and police force,” said Khare, “clearly, we have also failed.”

In the last week this story has gone from horrendous and outrageous to virtually unbelievable and incomprehensible. These atrocities and violent attacks on women and children occurred right under peacekeepers’ noses, literally.

U.N. officials said they were unaware of the rapes that occurred in Luvungi from June 30 to August 3, despite the fact that they ran at least one patrol during the attacks. The U.N. claims they did not find out about the rapes until August 3, but an internal email dated June 30 said otherwise. The message sent to United Nation agencies and private aid groups warned them to avoid the area due to the rebel takeover and told them that a woman was raped.

A five-year civil war in the DRC ended in 2003, yet seven years later the Congolese government still lacks control and organization of the country. Rebel groups like the Rwandan FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) are notorious for gang raping and pillaging the Congo’s eastern regions.

The U.N.’s peacekeeping mission in DR Congo, MONUSCO, was put in place to counter these rebel attacks and protect the villagers. Unfortunately, the U.N. peacekeepers are not only under stark criticism for their nonresponsive nature, but in 2004 and 2005 a sex scandal that involved countless peacekeepers emerged. During the investigation videotapes surfaced that depicted graphic images of pedophilia, rape and prostitution of the villagers the peacekeepers were supposed to be “protecting.”

Some villagers were sexually abused and then given food or money afterwards to disguise the rape as prostitution. Despite the disgusting nature of these acts, at the end of the investigation only a handful of peacekeepers were deported and no U.N. staff was charged with criminal activity. The U.N. introduced a new “code of conduct,” but an outside organization or group dedicated to human rights monitoring was never established.

Where is the advocate for the people of the DRC when their government is in shambles and the peacekeepers have a history of being predators themselves?

Women have traditionally been spoils of war and subject to barbaric behavior that often cost them their place in society, the ability to care for their children and even their lives. Gang rapes and deplorable sexual attacks are all too familiar to the people of the Congo and the faux vigilance of the United Nations has created an environment of acceptance of human rights violations.

There is a sick sense of complacency and apathy that has descended over the DRC and permeated U.N. offices at the highest level.

U.N. envoy Margot Wallstrom sent a senior member of her staff on the fact-finding mission and acknowledged that rape is the weapon of choice in the DRC.

“The sad reality is that incidents of rape have become so commonplace that they do not trigger our most urgent interventions,” Wallstrom said.

It is incredibly disheartening to hear that the gang rape of more than 500 people including girls as young as 16, women as old as 75 and infants does not trigger an urgent intervention from an organization whose sole purpose is to “create the conditions for lasting peace,” according to the U.N. peacekeeper website.

Many news outlets quoted Wallstrom’s hard hitting claims of reform to U.N. policy and restoring justice in the Congo. All statements echo a false sense of urgency and responsiveness that the United Nations has not demonstrated historically.

The reports and staggering tolls of inhumane acts in the DRC have exposed a bigger issue within a flawed organization. People’s lives are at stake and there is no longer room for complacency and oversight. We are yet again reminded of the atrocities that are taking place beyond America’s backyard. What happens next? Should we continue funding U.N. peacekeeping missions if they’ve been wildly unsuccessful so far?