

Explanation for Dr. Denis Mukwege's visit to Japan on October 2-8, 2019

August 22, 2019

On behalf of the Association of Sexual Violence and Conflict in the DR Congo (ASVCC)¹, I am very pleased and honored to announce the visit of Dr. Denis Mukwege, 2018 Nobel Peace Laureate and gynecologist from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to Japan on 2-8 October 2019. This visit is part of Dr. Mukwege's ongoing global campaign for "Peace, Justice and Women's Rights." This is his first visit to Japan since receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, but his second overall visit after first coming in 2016. As it did in 2016, ASVCC will coordinate his visit in collaboration with some institutions, such as the University of Tokyo, NGO Peace Boat, and Ritsumeikan University. This visit is funded by various organizations, such as the Mitsubishi Fund, the Niwano Peace Foundation, and the Takagi Fund.

Dr. Mukwege and Iraqi human rights activist Nadia Murad were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. This is the first time that the Nobel Peace Prize Committee ever awarded the Prize to those who have contributed to ending sexual violence in conflict zones, despite a lengthy global history of sexual violence in conflict zones.²

Objective of Dr. Mukwege's Visit

The main objectives of his visit are the following:

Objective 1. to raise awareness about the ongoing problems in the DRC of sexual violence, conflict minerals and the global economy, as well as poor governance.

Since conflict broke out in eastern DRC in 1996, sexual violence has become so common that eastern DRC was once dubbed "the rape capital of the world," and "the worst place in the world for women and girls." Sexual violence has been used by armed groups—both government and rebels—partially in order to control Congo's rich minerals, which directly and indirectly benefits the global economy. Restoring peace and ending sexual violence in the DRC is a crucial factor towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence, there must be a recognition of the contribution by Congolese women towards sustainable development, economic and inclusive growth, and their potential as key players towards the SDGs.

Objective 2: to raise awareness on the importance of eradicating sexual violence as a weapon of war and

¹ ASVCC was established in 2016 in order to raise awareness about the interrelationship among sexual violence, conflict minerals and global economy in eastern DRC. ASVCC has organized screening of Dr. Mukwege's documentary film "The Man who Mends Women" (2015) after having added Japanese subtitle, and has conducted research on the DRC.

² Previous Nobel Peace Laureates who have contributed in similar areas are the following: Jane Addams (USA) in 1931, founder of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) who worked to get the great powers to disarm and conclude peace agreements; Emily Greene Balch (USA) in 1946, central leader of the WILPF to make known the causes of war and work for a permanent peace; Shirin Ebadi (Iran) in 2004 for her efforts for democracy and human rights, especially on the struggle for the rights of women and children; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia), Leymah Bowee (Liberia), and Tawakkol Karman (Yemen) in 2011 for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work.

culture of impunity, just like abolishing nuclear weapons.

Unless the perpetrators of sexual violence, from frontline offenders to their leadership, are held legally accountable, a vicious cycle of sexual violence towards future generations will continue. International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor is a strong advocate for the prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence and has made its investigation a priority. However, a final conviction for sexual violence crimes was made at the ICC for the first time only recently; on July 8, 2019, the ICC declared that Bosco Ntaganda was guilty of war crimes etc. in northeastern DRC.³

Objective 3: to call for action to eradicate sexual violence and promote women's rights as prerequisites for global peace and stability.

Raising awareness about eradicating sexual violence is one thing, but action is another issue entirely. As long as sexual violence is rampant and perpetrators remain unpunished, there will be no durable and positive peace around the world. Moreover, it is well recognized that in addition to socio-political and economic inequality between women and men, violence against women further increases risks of state instability, internal disputes, and international conflict. Therefore, eradicating various forms of violence against women is a crucial factor for achieving peace, security and stability in our global society.

Objective 4: to obtain support from committed individuals and groups for Dr. Mukwege's agenda by spreading awareness, providing logistics/finance and researching related issues (sexual violence, human rights, peace and democracy).

In spite of growing interest, there are still few researchers and individuals in Japan who specialize in this issue in the DRC and Africa.

In order to achieve these objectives, Dr. Mukwege is expected to meet governmental officials and other concerned parties, and to deliver lectures in Tokyo (University of Tokyo), Hiroshima (Peace Museum), and Kyoto (Ritsumeikan University). He will also exchange ideas with scholars, women's groups, medical doctors, *Hibakusha* and students.

We expect to achieve the following from Dr. Mukwege's visit:

1. The Government of Japan will demonstrate stronger leadership in eradicating sexual violence around the world;
2. The Government of Japan will play a stronger role in strengthening national, regional and international judicial systems;
3. Citizens' rising awareness that sexual violence (both in war time and peace time) represent human rights violations, and the women need to raise their voices more to eradicate sexual violence; and,
4. Increasing interest and a growing number of researchers on the DRC, African politics, conflict, peace studies etc.

Timeliness of Dr. Mukwege's Visit to Japan

When Dr. Mukwege visited Japan from September to October 2016, most Japanese media, unlike those in Europe

³ The ICC has never indicted anyone for sexual crimes in eastern DRC.

and North America, hardly heard his name. ASVCC was obliged to actively screen Dr. Mukwege's film as much as possible and explain his extraordinary work and mobilize the media.

This time, obviously, such mobilization is unnecessary due to his status as a "Nobel Peace Laureate." His name has indeed become known and popular among the Japanese activists. He is a hero not only among Congolese women and men, but also women worldwide, in and out of conflict zones, especially among survivors of sexual violence in "peace time."

Although the objective and nature of sexual violence in conflict zones can differ from that in peace time, both have the common characteristics of the abuse and violation of women's bodies rights.

Apart from sexual crimes which are only reported occasionally, discrimination against women is still ongoing in Japan. One recent symbolic incident was Tokyo Medical University's admission in June 2018 that it had been deliberately altered entrance exam scores for more than a decade to restrict the number of female students and ensure more men became doctors.

Request for Donation

Finally, ASVCC would like to take this opportunity to highly thank the Funds and Foundations mentioned at the beginning of this paper, for their kind contribution to make Dr. Mukwege's visit possible.

We hope that you can also join Dr. Mukwege's global campaign in order to eradicate sexual violence and impunity worldwide through your donation to the following bank account.

Mitsubishi UFJ Bank, Chofu Sub-Office

Bank account number 0469236 (ordinary)

Bank account name: コンゴの性暴力と紛争を考える会 代表 米川正子 (ASVCC Representative Masako Yonekawa)

ASVCC will be responsible for delivering all the donations to Panzi Foundation led by Dr. Mukwege. Please ensure to send a message to congomm2016@gmail.com to inform ASVCC about your donation.

You may also wish to contribute directly to Panzi Foundation:

<https://www.panzifoundation.org/donate>

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation, and looking forward to seeing you in October 2019 during Dr. Mukwege's visit.

Masako Yonekawa
Representative, Association of Sexual Violence and Conflict in the DR Congo