

BURUNDI, POST CONFLICT COUNTRY

MOBILIZATION OF OPINION AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Burundi is recovering from a long and serious crisis. A crisis which has devastated everything, mainly positives values, the ones related to respect of human being in her physical, moral and spiritual integrity. The social, economic and cultural reference system that has been a pride for Burundians for long has been deeply disrupted, thus giving free way to mad schemes without name in standard vocabulary.

People who are not informed or greedy of sensationalism will limit to inter ethnic killings and accountancy of the dead. The time is no more to the current events with regard armed conflict but to physical and moral rehabilitation of the country, to spirits healing and rehabilitation of social values.

I would like to catch this opportunity to set out a picture not very glorious of the history of my country; a picture that relates facts and gestures that have noticeably affected Burundian woman's dignity.

Sexual violence

At the pick of Burundian crisis, rape was used as a weapon of war that did not limit to the only physical destruction but also a weapon that affected morals and customs of the country. It has been committed in varied circumstances. Gruesome scenes preceded, accompanied or succeeded sexual violence against a Burundian mother, young lady and little girl. The numbers of victims went on increasing overnight as if it was a racing to prove bravery. Cases of non desired pregnancies are innumerable today; HIV/AIDS nasty related transmission cases are reported with all the procession of misfortune one can imagine. I will cite for instance family breaking up, street children phenomenon; households led by children, brief orphans due to the crisis that planning development policy has never foreseen.

Sexual violence circumstances are as well varied as the authors of the diverse infamies. If lack of privacy phenomenon in displaced and refugee camps is often mentioned as a favouring factor of sexual violence, there

are other factors no less important. Those are combatants during the civil war but also UN peace keeping forces in Burundi. So many cases denouncing the two categories were reported.

Some solutions are nowadays suggested for declared cases. There are for example reception centres for psycho social and medical care of victims to prevent HIV/AIDS transmission and all the consequences. Legal proceedings are also undertaken to punish the criminals and provide victims with moral and material repair. Many cases are pending in courts. Sexual violence is not the only evil affecting the woman's dignity, other forms of violence are also known in Burundi according to the situation in which a woman finds herself.

Violence based on the woman's status

Under this heading, widows are much more mentioned. Following HIV/AIDS pandemic, many Burundian women became widows. Thus, they became vulnerable for a quite number of reasons. If they are not threatened to be fired in their work, they no longer benefit from the same consideration or respect on professional aspect. That aggravates more their moral when they need it most. Possibilities of being promoted grow slimmer and their future becomes uncertain. Beyond the bias on professional aspect, other evils are not to ignore. It is for example the social environment which can be hostile to a woman because of widow status. Two cases are worth mentioning. A woman named Jovite has been harassed by her family in law forcing her she should leave the house of late husband in order to be used for other purposes, selling it not excluded. In addition to threatening her to live her proper house, Jovite underwent physical violence that ended in breaking some of her limbs.

Another case no less distressing is that of Mrs Béatrice NDUWIMANA, a widow who missed her family in law's support when she badly needed it. When her two small daughters, Belice(04 years) and Beate(03 years) had just been horribly raped by a house boy who should take care of them, her family in law threw themselves brutally on Béatrice accusing her of all evils. The widow spent many weeks in a psychiatric hospital. Today she's progressively recovering.

Repatriated women and widows of military servicemen find themselves in a status that puts them in certain form of vulnerability. Burundi legislation accuses a legal gap related to inheritance for women. Very

often, they are faced with difficulty of access to land that belong to their deceased husbands.

Efforts to find answers to different cases are deployed to reduce their vulnerability.

Other forms of vulnerability are related to the war situation that lasted too much.

War trauma related violence

War did not save traditional structures of supervision. The absence of the latter made people abandoned and so were on their own, adopted thereafter short term solutions. Other cases were simply traumatised ending up in losing their land marks. Entrepreneurship spirit disappeared leaving way to dependence which is very much pronounced. Fear of the future settling in her, a woman becomes the laughing stock of everybody.

Economic related violence

Providing a girl with schooling has not always been a concern for some parents. Without schooling, women are reduced to activities of very weak income. Qualified as a person not bringing much income to the family, a woman will only have access to scraps of their greedy husbands. To any single claim of her rights, a woman often undergoes physical violence.

The picture so made out is enough gloomy but exit ways exist.

With the fresh outbreak of violence phenomenon to women many actors of Civil Society were born. Their actions are coordinated by the Government by means of the Ministry of National solidarity, Human Rights and Gender. An emergency plan has just been adopted and needs financial support.

The government of Burundi is furthermore aware of the necessity to repress all forms of violence done to women. It has decided to bring proceedings against all the authors of violence in order to fight against impunity, source of revenge. The government is committed to denounce and condemn resort to rape and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatments as a weapon of war. The country legislation must accommodate to today's situation in the aim of fighting any form of discrimination and violence related to gender. In fact, legal gaps, source of confusion, discrimination and violence must be filled. The President of the Republic gave an example at the International Celebration Day dedicated to women. Political willing to promulgate laws that protect

children, widows, women living with AIDS, those who have no children is clearly stated today and will soon be put into action. I would like to let you unveil the content of my message throughout the following pictures.

THANK YOU