

Sexual Crimes - Largely Forgotten in the Habré Case

Dakar, October 16, 2015 - Five weeks after the start of the trial of former Chadian dictator, Hissène Habré, 17 women's rights organization, including the [Panzi Foundation](#) of Dr Denis Muwege, often referred to as "the man who mends women", have issued an Open letter denouncing the insufficient attention given to sexual violence in the indictment.

The letter, addressed to the President and Chief Prosecutor of the Extraordinary African Chambers warns, "Failing to prosecute Hissène Habré for sexual crimes would be a missed historical opportunity, depriving a large number of victims recognition for the crimes they suffered because they are women."

As the Chambers are about to hear the testimonies of victims of sexual violence for the first time, the letter deplores the scant attention crimes of sexual violence have received in the trial against Habré. Existing testimonies suggest that sexual violence was widespread, including against men, and give accounts of gang rape as well as sexual slavery in military camps.

In an effort to ensure that crimes of sexual violence are not forgotten and do not go unpunished, the signatories of the open letter ask that more women be called to testify, and that each witness and victim who could have knowledge of relevant facts be questioned on the use of sexual violence in detention centers and military camps, as well as during arrests and military operations.

A judgment against Habré recognizing acts of sexual violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity would be in line with existing jurisprudence from international tribunals, and would send a strong message to the international community and to future generations that this form of violence is not a collateral effect of war or of a repressive regime, but constitutes an independent and international crime in itself.

Seventeen organizations signed the Open letter, notably African organizations such as the [Panzi Foundation](#) of Dr Muwege winner of numerous human rights prizes, including the United Nations Human Rights Prize and the Sakharov prize of the European Parliament. American organizations such as the human rights institute at the prestigious Yale University as well as the [Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice](#) and [Equality Now](#), two international women's rights organizations that advocate for the prosecution of sexual violence and gender-based crimes also signed the letter.

The Habré trial is currently being heard by the [Extraordinary African Chambers](#) in Senegal, which has jurisdiction for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and torture. The Chambers were inaugurated by Senegal and the African Union in February 2013 to proceed against the principal individuals responsible for international crimes committed in Chad between 1982 and 1990 when Hissène Habré was in power. The trial resumed on September 7, 2015 and should last until December 2015. More than one hundred witnesses have been called to testify thus far.