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**Women from Kivu
speak out**

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Editorial

The intercongolese dialogue, promised and awaited for many months seems to have come back into the news since the assassination of Kabila in January 2001. Pole Institute did not wait for this to happen before continuing her work of bringing together the different points of view of the men and women of Kivu. Up to now, we have published two editions on the intercongolese dialogue, with analyses and opinions of actors on the social and civil scene. We want to give them a platform to express themselves, these men and women who do not have special access to the international media. This of course fits into the framework of values promoted by Pole Institute: tolerance and mutual respect, looking each person in the eye, to arrain the goal of peaceful cohabitation of communities, and mutual enrichment of cultures.

We noticed, however, that in previous editions it was mainly men who expressed themselves. So we decided that this edition would be devoted exclusively to women, who are the centre of efforts to survive, in each family, community and society, and who are often left out when it comes to taking political decisions. We wanted to know what they think of the present crisis, how they manage, and what they see as the way out of the crisis.

The edition we are placing before you now is focused on interviews with women from several regions of the two Kivus.

■ In South Kivu, in the region of Uvira, we interviewed women from different local ethnic groups (babembe, banyamulenge, bafulero, bavira) organised in Christian associations, in local non-governmental organisations, and the women's network of Uvira.

■ In North Kivu, we recorded interviews in Goma, Kitshanga and Kilolirwe with women of the Platform of Feminine Organisations (PNFDE), one teacher, and one business woman,

women from different development NGOs based at Kitshanga, and returning Congolese Tutsis based for the time at Kilolirwe.

■ In the 'far north', meaning the northern part of North Kivu, in Butembo, we spoke to representatives of women's development NGOs, at the Committee meeting of UWAKI on 8th March 2001.

These interviews were conducted in Swahili, Kinande, Kinyarwanda and French. We have tried to preserve to the maximum the oral flavour of the conversations, so that the authentic voice of these women can be heard. We apologise for any errors, repetitions, or clumsy expressions, which are our responsibility alone.

Many different accents become evident from these interviews, depending upon the time when they took place, and according to the political, military, cultural or social situation of the place. Interviews in Goma and Kitshanga took place in September, in Butembo towards the end of November, in Kilolirwe in December, and in Uvira at the end of January 2001, after the assassination of Kabila. The Goma and Uvira areas are under the control of the RCD Goma, allied to the Rwandan army; the far north is under the control of other rebel movements allied to the Ugandan army. In addition, the interviews in the far north took place in a situation where the political power was in total confusion.

Despite these differences, we have been able to identify a certain number of commonalities among the women who are speaking:

- They cannot take any more suffering from the war, and wish for peace with all their being.
- They are the ones today who keep their families and communities alive, and they are conscious of this fact.
- They are opposed to military logic, and want civilian logic to be strengthened.

- They wish for opportunities for dialogue with women from other countries involved in the war, to create a powerful lobby for peace.
- They are disappointed with men, especially politicians, and claim the right to speak and to decide, among other things through a strong representation of women among the delegates to the intercongolese dialogue.
- They want to work towards a better understanding of what caused the wars, to analyse these causes in order to build a better future grounded on understanding.
- They see education as a key element in preparing a better future.
- Women who have been refugees in other countries, such as the Babembe of South Kivu who fled to Tanzania, and the Rwandophone people of north Kivu who fled to camps in Rwanda, are determined never again to go into exile. They prefer a hard life at home to the life of a refugee.

We note very diverse regional logics, and efforts at peace building must take this into account, and start with reality at the microcosmic level. At the same time, the presence of foreign armies and militia requires solutions at the sub-regional and international levels. It will not be easy to maintain a balance between these two 'feet' which are so far apart.

We also note a difference of approach between regions where populations of diverse ethnic origin have lived together for a long time, and regions that are more or less mono-ethnic. Falling back on one's tribal identity, excluding the outsider, these are the dominant reflexes of the mono-ethnic zones, whereas the need for compromise to arrive at peaceful cohabitation is predominant in multi-ethnic zones. The temptation to put all the responsibility for the present situation on "the outsider" - a scapegoat who can always be found - is stronger in mono-ethnic zones. The history of Congo, on the other hand, demonstrates

among other things how easy it is for third parties to divide populations that are already accusing each other, and to loot the wealth that belongs to them.

This is another reason to promote true dialogue between all these communities, a dialogue that does not promote hate, that excludes no one, and takes into account the preoccupations of everyone. Such a dialogue is complex, it requires frankness, courage and time. It cannot take place between people who have lost their memory; it must be rooted in history, in stories, those that the people involved have lived through.

So we offer to you the richness and diversity of the woman's point of view from different regions of the two Kivus.

Their demands, especially their thirst to understand, to get out of the role of victim, to empower themselves for an in-depth analysis which they can compare with the analyses of other women and other players, these are also the priorities that Pole Institute has adopted for the year 2001.

So we hope to support them in this, and contribute to promote a dialogue between them which will not be based on the pursuit of political positions, but rather on a better future for their children, all their children, regardless of the community to which they belong.

Aloys Tegera
Kisangani Endanda
Christiane Kayser

Pole Institute
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Interview with two representatives of the Women's Network of Uvira, South Kivu

On 21st January 2001 in Uvira, we met two women representing a women's network made up of women from Fizi, and Uvira, as well as from the High Plateaux.

Gégé Katana Bukuru is a member of the NGO ELIMU ('knowledge' in Swahili) and secretary of the women's network. Aimée Byamungu is a member of the NGO GAPF (Assistance Group for the Promotion of Families) and treasurer of the Women's Network for Associative Development in Uvira. The interview was recorded in French by Aloys Tegera and Christiane Kayser

Question: Since 1996, Kivu has been going through a very difficult period. Can you tell me how women here have experienced this crisis, and how they manage to survive in it all?

Gégé: Since 1996, we have been through a critical period. There is a political crisis, an economic crisis, and a social crisis. It is the political crisis in particular that impacts the other two. We women haven't enough information about this political crisis, since the decisions are taken high up there, and women are not consulted when decisions are taken.

At the level of the women's network, all of us, in the town and the countryside, we have decided we do not want any more war. We want peace. It is women who are the victims of war. We are not even allowed to give our point of view, since there is not freedom of speech. Whatever we say is often misinterpreted.

For the politicians, it's only power that counts, but for women, the social issues play an important role. Women become widows, their children no longer go to school. Many children have become soldiers, we call them *kadogo*. Many children have gone off to fight with the *mayi-mayi*. All this becomes a problem for women. In the present situation, in our region, in the zones of Uvira, Fizi and Hauts Plateaux, women have taken assumed responsibility. They have to support their families: medical care, food, school fees for the children. Economically, the region is on its knees. Because of two wars, the population has fled, they have had to go elsewhere. But women here used to make a living on their fields, with their herds, or by trading in a small way with neighbouring Rwanda, Burundi or Tanzania. But because of this crisis, most of them have been forced to abandon their fields, their animals, their trade. They cannot move around freely, neither for agriculture nor for trade.

These recent years, many women have been raped in their fields or on the road. Everywhere you see women traveling with their worldly goods on their head. They stay somewhere for a few weeks, then once again, people come and attack them. Right now, we don't even know who these people are who attack innocent villagers. There are soldiers, there are fighters, there are also bandits, armed thieves. We really don't know who to look to for protection right now.

Women want the authorities, the present leaders, to take responsibility for the security of the population. If there are attacks, let them protect us. Often the attackers come in battle dress, we don't know if they are soldiers or not.

Women complain that they do not know what is going on. We don't know what is happening elsewhere. They say there are violations of the Lusaka agreement, but we don't know what those decisions were, and who is violating them. Here in our

area, we have all sorts of armed groups: mayi-mayi, warriors (banyamulenge fighters, militia of the FDD (from Burundi), Burundian soldiers, Rwandan soldiers. We women feel that it's a great pity that in the area under occupation these leaders can't agree amongst themselves. We really don't know what it will all come to. Women want peace. We don't want any more war. We want people to agree together for a cease fire, we want human beings to be treated with dignity, to be able to express themselves freely.

Question: Gégé told us that women are the victims of this crisis. Aimée, can you tell us more about what that means?

Aimée: You know that we are at war. But at the same time, it's really not our business. We are not in the groups that won this war. No one asks our opinion, but we are the victims. We are raped in the fields, we are raped everywhere. Our children become orphans, we become widows. That's the case for most of us. It's difficult to survive.

And for those women who are still lucky enough to have a husband, often the husband has no work. Those who work are not paid. Many children no longer go to school because there's no money. Often there isn't even any food to eat.

In society, let's say that the different ethnic groups do not understand one another. Some are losers, some are winners. The military for example; the families of soldiers on the side of the rebel government, they are winners, and those who have no high ranking contacts are losers. We women, we have no hearing among the people who want to continue the war. We are not involved in decision making.

Gégé: I would like to add that, at first, when we women became victims, we said nothing. Now we have decided we have had

enough. I wouldn't say that we want to seize power, but at least get organised to defend our rights. That is why we organised ourselves into the Network there are women from the Hauts Plateaux (*zone where the Banyamulenge live*), women from Fizi, women from Uvira and women from the plain. We came together to discuss our problems. Because of the wars, people can no longer live together. For example, Babembe women said: "No, I can't live with the Banyamulenge, they will kill me." The banyamulenge women said the same thing about the Babembe. For example, some banyamulenge women said: "We will continue the fight to the very last Munyanmulenge." They've started to use the language of the politicians. This is true of all ethnic groups.

The conflicts in this region are not what people outside say they are. Outside, people just talk about the Banyamulenge conflict. But it's not just a problem of Banyamulenge in this region. For example, in different government services here, there are the people from Kinshasa and elsewhere who come to work here. They are called the *bakuyakuya*. That means, that they are not born here. Even among the Babembe, there are conflicts. Between this group and that, between this village and that village. People don't get on. There are serious problems between the Bavira and the Bafulero. There are long-standing problems between the Bashi, the Bahavu and others in the region. If there is conflict, it's of our own creation, it's been created by men. Right now, the conflict has been strengthened and prolonged by those who have come in to help us. They came to accentuate the problems between us; they view each other with suspicion, whereas if we were left to our own devices, it would have been possible to dialogue. That is why, within the Women's Network, we have chosen non-violence as our principle. We speak out clearly if there is a problem between us. We try to dialogue. For example, before, we could not share a meal together. Everyone was frightened of the other, that they

would poison their food. Now, in the network, at every meeting and every assembly, one woman or another prepares food, and we all share the same meal, whatever our ethnic origin. We go to the homes of the AFC women (they are banyamulenge) and they prepare a meal for us and give us something to drink. Another day, we at ELIMU welcome them. Another time, we go to the organization of the Babembe women.

We discussed for a long time together. Our conclusion is that we cannot go on killing one another. We asked ourselves: Why do we have this conflict? Why do people want to divide us? We discussed these questions, every ethnic group gave their point of view. We asked ourselves: What caused this conflict? We saw that everywhere the arguments were not valid. We ourselves could advance no valid reasons. The conflict has been imposed on us, it was conceived by others. We said to ourselves: Let's be careful. If we don't stop all this, even our children will go on killing each other. It will go on for twenty, thirty years. That is why we call on the authorities, we often invite people to discuss these problems with them. We want to find the way to propagate our opinions, to organise a sort of conference or debate. We want to exchange ideas with the women of Burundi and Rwanda, and other women from the Great Lakes region, and together try to find a solution. We say to ourselves: we can't afford to wait for those high-ups to make a move, we can start to work right here, at our level.

As our network is open, there are some women married to representatives of the authorities, some married to military personnel. There are also peasant women, nurses, women traders, all the social classes. We all try to influence our children and our husbands to move towards peace. When we discuss among ourselves, we see clearly that this war is futile, it has no reason to exist. So this is the point of view we defend before the authorities.

We also say to ourselves, that when they have their national conference over there - I don't know if that is what they are going to call it - they should not only send politicians, they also need women delegates from this area to tell them what we want. We've already seen how useless these meetings of politicians are, since they do not see the concerns of people at the grass roots.

I can tell them that here, in the zones of Fizi and Uvira, before, there were never any children with kwashiorkor, but now we are finding malnourished children, even malnourished adults. Before, that never existed, there was always enough to eat. Now it's a big problem to find something to eat, even for one meal a day.

Our main objective as women is to look for peace. We are also working for our children. Some women have children who have gone off into the forest, they are called MayiMayi; others have children who are called warriors - the banyamulenge fighters; and then there are women who have children in the army of the RCD. So we are fortunate to be able to influence all these children. Those whose husbands are politicians must also explain to them what they should do. Beside the lake, on the plain, up on the High Plateaux, we want to organise conferences on all this. But we lack the resources. We want to present a joint proposal for dialogue, to set up activities together, work together. That way we will understand each other better. We will be able to reach many more members.

Question: You say that the conflict in this region is different. How would you define this difference?

Gégé: People have tried to put more emphasis on the conflict between the Banyamulenge and the Babembe, as if it is a hatred

that can never be overcome. But you must understand that in the past, the Banyamulenge children who were in school came down to the plain and lived with Babembe families, or Bavira or Bafulero families, because there are no schools up there. Myself, I'm not from the region, I come from the Bukavu area. But I've been here a long time. I've been able to see this happen, and people were used to doing this. The conflicts that have arisen in this area concern chiefly work appointments, land, pastures. Especially conflicts over pastures. Those conflicts can only be resolved by the people concerned. No one from outside can come in and bring a solution.

Another serious problem is dishonesty. No one has told the truth to the people outside about the real underlying problem. Often people don't have this honesty. Even among Christians ... In the past, when you were Christian, you forgave each other easily. Today, you will see that there are even divisions among Christians. Now it's become really serious. We have to find the cause. What is the real cause? What is the solution?

Now people are beginning a dialogue, at least, and before they were not doing that. When Kabila came to power, people here said that the Banyamulenge had brought in the Rwandans to steal our lands. Even now there are problems. We did not understand the real purpose of the war. We thought that they wanted to annex part of our region to Burundi, another part to Rwanda and a third part to Uganda. That's what people had in their minds. When Kabila came, he brought all that. Here, we don't see the conflict in terms of Banyamulenge opposed to people in the plains, we see that they want to grab the province. That's what people are afraid of: "We will be annexed, we will lose our land." With the Banyamulenge, we really have no quarrel that could cause a war. Both sides have killed, both are at fault. Who is wrong? Who is right? Who has killed? Who has not killed? This is the sort of analysis we need to help us

end this crisis. So there have been massacres on both sides, what can we do about it now? Everyone has to try and look for a solution to all of this.

Question: We are impressed by your efforts to bring women together from many ethnic groups, to go beyond your fear and to build confidence between you. Aimée, when you meet together, are you able to talk about the problems between those who feel that they have suffered at the hands of others who have benefited?

Aimée: We do try to talk about it, to share. Often we say to ourselves: we have to talk frankly. Leave all hypocrisy outside, and come into these meetings with frankness. Everyone has to recognise their own faults. After that, we can forgive one another and begin a new life.

Question: Can you tell us more about the exclusion of women from decision making? Isn't your work basically a demand for power, which will allow you to have a say in the decisions that affect life here in your region?

Gégé: In Uvira zone, we have asked to attend meetings, and we do so; for example, security meetings. There we advocate the cause of women. There were many soldiers there, and I'm not sure they really listened to us. You have to realise, here we are at the lowest point of South Kivu region, it's like we are in a hole. Whatever we do, no one ever hears about what we are doing. We would like to join forces with women from neighbouring regions, from Burundi, Rwanda. That would strengthen our cause. Because here, if you try to do anything, you are the one who will be targeted. Since I am lucky enough to travel, people suspect that I have a means of communication, a short wave radio, and that I influence women in a negative way. They are

afraid that the women's network will become a force to be reckoned with.

At the moment, the displaced women from Makobola are here. They sleep at night out in the open. There are floods, and houses are washed away. Everything that people grow is destroyed. We really need to do something.

We also need to exchange ideas with those who come from further away. At a meeting of International Alert, we met a Senegalese woman who talked about her home.

We need money, yes, but money is secondary; first of all, we need thinkers. We need ideas to do a good job.

Aimée: I don't think we want power, but we do want to help. Here, the administration of the zone has set up Mutual Funds, and people have appointed groups of elders, according to their tribes. But there are only men there. We, as women, want to take part in these meetings of the elders. We can help to influence the women so they can help to bring their children back from the bush, the Bebembe, the Bifulero and also the Banyamulenge.

Gégé: These committees of elders were not appointed by the Commissioner of the Zone, but by ethnic groups. According to the tradition in such committees of elders, there were only men; that's why they did it this way. But today, we are asking for women to be included too.

We have seen that sometimes, people from outside spread false information, perhaps because they don't see the whole picture. So we are asking that people come down here, like you have done, come down to see what is going on. I want to emphasise that even in Mobutu's time, there were many problems here. It

was always a difficult area, called a “red zone”. There were quarrels, there were wars. Mobutu wanted to impose his way of doing things and his rule, and it’s here that people revolted against him. But it wasn’t as bad then as it is now. It has become more violent. There are arms. There are also many rumors and little reliable information. There’s no freedom of speech. Sometimes we broadcast our message over the radio, but we have to pay for radio announcements here.

Question: How do women survive financially in all this?

Aimée: In our NGO, we have started a bakery, so that women can make a living from selling bread. In the network, we give micro-credits so that women can have little businesses to survive.

Gégé: The women have organised themselves into groups. They try to cultivate fields. They raise small animals. Even though there are many thefts, it can help to pay school fees for the children. Besides, even if there is real insecurity, you can’t just fold your arms for ever. Nor can we wait and hope for help from international organisations. We would be waiting a long time. Displaced women from Fizi have no land to cultivate. So some organisations which have land have tried to share it out to them to cultivate. They were given hoes, and they have started to produce a little, in places where it is safe.

Question: Are you able to go out into the countryside here to cultivate your fields?

Gégé: We can go if there is protection for the farmers. Since all the parties fighting the war live off what is produced here, there are times when there is relative peace, and people take advantage of it to produce a little.

Question: Kabila was killed a few days ago. Does his death change anything for you? What are your fears, your hopes?

Gégé: Here, people are afraid. They fear that his death will have the same results as the death of Habyarimana. They are waiting: will someone replace him quickly? What will the parties to the war do to bring peace? Has someone been prepared to replace him, so we don't repeat the situation that Rwanda experienced in 1994? We must hope too that now people will begin a dialogue.

Interview with representatives of the Association of Christian Women (AFC), Uvira, South Kivu

On 21st January 2001, Aloys Tegera and Christiane Kayser from Pole Institute met and interviewed three members of the Association of Christian Women. Yunia Naremezo, Eva Bokuru and Mameya Naremezo gave us their viewpoint and their experience. Towards the end, Gudule Nasine from the NGO UGEAFI came and joined us. The interview took place in Swahili, and was translated by Eddy Kikumbu.

Question: Since 1996, we have lived through two wars, one after the other, and some people have called the first war “the Banyamulenge war”. Today, the war is still going on, how are you, Banyamulenge women, living through this crisis?

Yunia: In my opinion, you can't say that only one side wants war. You can't say that this is the war of the Banyamulenge. This is a crisis that began in Congo. It began at the time of Mobutu, he encouraged this tribalism to take root. People chose Deputies, and all workers were supposed to be equal. But later, they began to call us foreigners: unlike everyone else, we had rights, none at all. This caused trouble. Everyone began to fight. But that doesn't mean that the Banyamulenge started this war. The war was born out of the tribalism of all ethnic groups. They attacked one tribe, ours, but this was in the context of a wholesale crisis in Congo.

Eva: People treated us with 'kaoneo', with scorn. People say it's our war, but it's not only our war. The war arose from everyone. They began to ridicule us and exclude us, and now this war has affected every ethnic group in Congo. They called it the “Banyamulenge war” because the Banyamulenge began to

demand their rights. They humiliated us in many ways, in all areas of life. After that, when we wanted to defend ourselves, they claimed it was our war, but we really did not want to start a war, we just wanted our rights. When we claimed our rights, the others started to kill us, saying that we were not the children of Congo.

For example, they killed a Munyamulenge near Kabera, at Baraka, and later others were killed. Everyone knows this. And then they started again in the West of the country. They threw their bodies into the Congo river, and when the Banyamulenge saw that their people were being killed, the war went on.

Question: How have Banyamulenge women lived through this war?

Mameya: Banyamulenge women have a hard life because of this war. Before, we had a good life. We owned property, but since the war, we have no more wealth. Our life is very hard, with many agonising questions: What are the children going to eat? How can I clothe them? Banyamulenge women see that because of this war, their children are malnourished and cannot go to school.

We are thinking of trading to survive. That's what we did before.

Eva: For the moment, God is helping us; the attackers who surrounded the High Plateaux are fewer. Up there, they were always disturbed, but we don't know what is going to happen next.

Here in Uvira, there are not so many attackers. But even so, we have a difficult life, because we have not yet found a lasting peace. We are looking for peace that will allow us to move around freely, and live together with others like we did before.

Mameya: We are beginning to see that people are feeling better and that love is returning. People are raising awareness here, there are peacemaking meetings, and other peace building activities. People listen and some of the fighters are coming out of the forest.

Question: They say that in the region of Uvira, the Banyamulenge are fighting against the Babembe. Do you think the problem here is between the Babembe and the Banyamulenge, or are there other conflicts here, and what are they about?

Gudule: The Babembe are fighting, but also the Bafulero. It's not just between the Banyamulenge and the Babembe. The Babembe and the Bafulero are fighting against the Banyamulenge.

Question: Why are they fighting?

Eva: The Banyamulenge and the Babembe have lived together for a long time. They are like children with the same father, but with different mothers. This causes rivalry. When people started to get interested in political questions, when it became a question of who was going to represent the populations of the zone, they began to divide people. They made the Babembe and the Bafulero believe that the Banyamulenge were their enemies. Living together, there had been some points of discord for many years, problems over pastures, where to keep cows, problems over boundaries, perhaps. When politics started, they said the Banyamulenge were foreigners. They should be put aside, they should be sent away. This caused serious misunderstanding.

When you say that the war opposes the Banyamulenge and the Babembe, I must insist that you cannot generalise. Among the Banyamulenge, the Bavira, the Bebembe and the Bafulero, there bad people and good people on all sides. If one Mubembe does something bad and you say all Bebembe are bad - that's wrong. It's not everyone who brought this war. Some people are intervening to stop the war, and there are those who want the war. On the other hand, there are false rumours and lies that generalise everything.

Question: Can you tell us what life was like before between the Babembe and the Banyamulenge?

Yunia: We knew that we were all Congolese and that we lived together. Our children played together, our old people grew up together, and because of that we were like brothers. We knew that they were farmers and we were herders. If a cow gets into someone's field, that causes a conflict. And with the arrival of political problems, all this was aggravated, and now fighters are spreading war.

Eva: This crisis we are going through today is really a bad thing. We Banyamulenge women, we have special problems. We are the victims of a war that brings us no good thing: the first thing it brings is death. For example, I have lost my husband. This tells you how I am really a victim of this war. I cannot say that this war has brought a better life for anyone. Among our people, in Uvira or on the High Plateaux, you will find many widows. Their life is miserable. Our girls get married very young, without ever being able to go to school, they depend on their husbands and now these men are dead. People are eternally wretched. These are the effects of the war. That's why we want all these peacemaking programmes to spread, so people give up war and start to live normally again. This war affects everyone, but the Banyamulenge more than others. Really, we must encourage

peacemaking programmes so that peace can be restored, so that people calm down, so that we can at least bring up the children that are left to us.

Mameya: We believe that the work of peace is possible, because even if some make war because they like it, the others are simply villagers; people tell them that the Banyamulenge's luck has turned and it's time to fight them; straight away, they get up and go to war, without realising what they are doing.

The fighters from the other ethnic groups are in the forest, suffering all sorts of diseases, but they stay there. If there were awareness programmes, awareness raising on all sides, then things could work, and the Banyamulenge could go home; and the Babembe, and the Bafulero, because we have all seen the harm that war does.

Eva: Life was good before, we used to be like one family. There were marriages between the Banyamulenge, the Babembe, the Bafulero. We considered ourselves to be one people. Since this war began, people who were married to each other are killing each other; women who were married to Babembe men have been killed, men come home from the war enraged and kill their own wives.

Yunia: Another positive point is that the Babembe were the first to go to school. When the Banyamulenge came down from the High Plateaux to go to school, they used to stay in Babembe families without any problem. They were like brothers, they would stay a year, or for years, with no problems.

Gudule: Another positive point between us and the others, for example with the Babembe, people prayed together in the same church, the Pastors prayed together. What struck me too was the way I saw school children, students, study together. And then

again, they had the same traditions of love, they made a blood alliance - I've never seen it myself, but my parents told me about it.

Question: How do you think we can get out of this crisis?

Eva: What will help us to get through this is to meet together. We who are women of the churches, and members of the federations, we have places to meet together, with people of different tribes. In the churches and communities, at the end of each month, we get together, we eat and pray together. When we look around, we who have lived a long time here in Uvira, there are times when we see Babembe or Bifulero women that we knew before. If we meet like this by chance, we break down in tears. What has caused this war situation which stops us loving one another or visiting one another, like we used to in the past? That hate inside, many people don't have it. Those others in the forest won't listen to advice, they have no work, those people who are causing trouble here, who are fighting. If there are meetings, like what we are doing between the associations, we think that God can help us, and peace can be restored, and we can live like we did before.

Yunia: From my point of view, I think that the prevailing unemployment and poverty causes hatred. But people can create jobs, and work together. For example, in our association, we make bread and all the tribes come to buy it, and when we talk together, we become friends. The NGOs should come here to help people to work, and when they begin to work, there won't be that jealousy, because poverty and hunger create a very deep crisis. Truly, we want workshops for dialogue in the High Plateaux, in churches, markets, schools. Let everyone learn the lesson, so there will be peace.

Question: If people meet together, what can they say to each other in this dialogue, so that communities can live together without hate?

Eva: For myself, I think the meetings will have the purpose of peace building, so they should be for awareness raising for peacemaking. There really is no other theme. People can first of all meet separately, for example, banyamulenge women meet first with other women, to educate ourselves that we need peace first, because if we have peace, we will have work, the children will study and everything will go well.

Mameya: We have to remind people of the love we had before. We have to speak the truth to each other about the problems of tribalism. Since others say that the Banyamulenge are foreigners, some people here agree and others disagree. But in fact everyone knows that we are Congolese like everyone else. We have to love each other like we used to.

Yunia: I think that for all that, we need to raise awareness among people. Today, we have already lived through many problems, and we have to tell people so they understand. Everyone knows that the Banyamulenge are Congolese like everyone else. Perhaps some unemployed people who have no occupation try to do harm, but whoever wants to know this today knows it.

I have lived for a long time with people of other ethnic groups, and we know each other well. They say that those who are causing trouble try to make others uncomfortable so there is no peace. What we need to do is find the way to educate them, and convince them, and come close to one another again. Because they too have lost a lot: many markets have disappeared, women traders can no longer make a living, because they are stuck in one place and can no longer travel freely because it's not safe.

Some have even died because of that. They also want peace. Yesterday I was talking to a woman who trades in beans. She told me: "If there is peace this year, we will have plenty to eat, because we have cultivated big fields. We want peace right now."

Now how can we convince them that we are Congolese? I say, they know this and have always known this, but it's troublemakers who tell us that the Banyamulenge are foreigners. People led them astray to begin this war.

Question: You have spoken about the financial difficulties of different people. How do you, the Banyamulenge women, manage to survive?

Yunia: We Banyamulenge women have lost many possessions: cows, fields. So we have created our association to see how we can help women who do not know how to survive. We began by training women, teaching them how to make bread, how to cultivate a field, how to find food for their children, how to sew with a sewing machine. Some have also begun to trade, to start restaurants, some sell food on the market.

Gudule: When I went up to the High Plateaux, I saw the women there are having peace building meetings. They call the Babembe and Bafulero women to discuss how to bring peace. The Babembe women say that the problem is the Burundian FDD militia and the Rwandan interahamwe militia who are in the forest. When people here want to return home, they are the ones who forbid it. Those who have managed to come out of the forest, the women give them soap and food: that is their contribution to peace.

I've also seen all those widows who cannot make a living. When we had cows, you know, we were happy. But these widows,

today they have begun to trade in salt and soap, in particular. Others are cultivating fields, and others are making bricks and building. They asked me how to get some capital to start making soap and selling it. That encourages me. I see that Banyamulenge women are beginning to manage on their own. Here in Uvira, women are beginning to learn how to make soap.

Eva: Here in Uvira, there are women who have organised themselves by urban areas. They buy goods, and sell them to pay for their children's school fees. These are little jobs that allow them to survive.

Question: Other women told us that in the women's network, each group in turn prepares food and invites the others, so that the women from all ethnic groups eat together without hate or distrust. Did you know about this?

Mameya: For example, in our association AFC, we prepare food, there is a group of evangelists that prepares food that we take to the hospital and to the prison. We give to everyone. And again, there are two meetings we had in the CADC (Community of the Assemblies of God in Congo). We invited all the tribes, we killed a cow and we ate together. No one was afraid. I was happy to see everyone eating without fear. Some even ate out of the same plate, and I understood that fear is beginning to disappear.

Eva: We really need this sort of meeting. When we organise it, we meet people we have not seen for a long time, we chatter for a long time, and each one is very happy to see her former friend. We are working through the churches and in our AFC - I am the president. Recently, we have been visiting each other. We have gone very far. We look each other in the eye, and begin to love one another again. Many of us among our Babembe or Bifulero

or Bavira brothers and sisters do not have this hate which has done us all so much harm.

Question: To end with, we would like to know what the death of the President Kabila means to you. What are your hopes and fears?

Yunia: For us the death of Kabila is a death like any other. We want to tell the new president that he must not do like Kabila to kill people. We hope he will be a president who seeks to restore peace. We ask that the new president should be a president for all of us, that there should be no more killing and exclusion of the Banyamulenge.

Eva: Well, of course Kabila had to die some day like any other person, but his problem was that he was too fond of war. Personally, when I heard he had died, I said to myself that perhaps there is now a chance of change and a move towards peace, perhaps the new one can restore peace to us.

All that is at the level of the politicians. But here, back home, we have to tell the truth, what is pushing people to make war is poverty. We see that even those who are living in the forest are suffering from malnutrition, they are not in good health and often they are simply unemployed young men. They even go into the homes of their brothers and loot and steal money. If we could find help, money to create work to help the women, the children, the young men, then development would come to the region and those who have gone to the forest would see that their brothers are living well in the home areas or villages. They will wonder why they bother to stay in the forest; what are they doing there? Then those who are still in the villages and towns could call them and bring them back. But right now, people have nothing, the crisis is everywhere, and there is nothing to eat.

Yunia: On the other hand, you have to know that the men go off alone when they are doing their peace building campaigns. I would like to see women with the men in this kind of meeting, to give them advice. We women know nothing of the purpose of their conflicts, they tell us nothing. But the women must give them advice, even if they don't like to hear it. A woman also has the right to live.

And I think that very few people from outside go to the High Plateaux. It's not enough to come just to Uvira. You must go everywhere and call on all the groups to give their point of view. You mustn't just help one group, you must include all sides.

Interview with Baobe Shabani of SOCODEFI and CEPROF, Uvira, South Kivu

On 22nd January 2001, we met Baobe Shabani at the office of SOCODEFI in Uvira. She represents the NGO SOCODEFI and at the same time she is coordinator of the women's branch of SOCODEFI called CEPROF. The interview was conducted in French by Aloys Tegera and Christiane Kayser.

Question: Can you describe to us the situation of Babembe women in this difficult crisis situation?

Answer: This is a critical situation for Babembe women. In 1996, we fled from the territory of Fizi and went to Tanzania. When we discovered there that it was a revolution, we decided to return here. In the refugee camps in Tanzania, we lived in such difficulties that we couldn't stay there. We are primarily farmers. There we just received, and it was food that we are not used to eating. Nor are we used to sitting waiting for handouts. Our children did not go to school. All this gave us the courage to return. We, the women and the children, we put pressure on the men.

When we returned here, really we were very happy. We got on with life as normal, we cultivated our fields, the men went fishing. Unfortunately, then there was the second war. Because of that, we are experiencing all the difficulties of poverty. That is the most serious problem for the women of Fizi. Today, they are very poor. In the past, we used to be able to give little credits to women. That gave them dignity in their family and in the eyes of their husbands. We were able to do that for eight months, then the second war came.

Today, there are 2000 displaced families here, mostly women and children. Many have come without clothes. There are attackers who make off with everything, every possession. Here in our society, the family means the woman. All the difficulties of displaced people affect firstly the woman.

Question: Fizi zone is going through a particularly difficult situation. Women are still there, not everyone has fled. Can you give us your impressions on that?

Answer: We know that we are at war. But the situation in other zones administered by RCD is not like Fizi zone. In Fizi, the resource of the woman is agriculture. Those who have remained behind are mostly widows, female headed households who have understood that no one is going to care for displaced people. They have understood that if they become displaced here, they will have no support. So they prefer to remain there with their children, even if they die there. And others perhaps do not have the means to leave the place.

At Fizi, there are MayiMayi in alliance with the soldiers of the Kinshasa government, fighting the soldiers of the government here. There are many violations targeting women. Traditionally in our society, the woman is respected, even if she does not have a very influential position in the community. The abuse that women are suffering in Fizi territory is unspeakable. We are helpless in the face of all this. But near Kasimia, one group of women got together and went to see the chief. They told him that the women are obliged to work in the fields, but that is where the attackers come, and rape all the women and steal their produce. When they go to market, they are attacked, they are raped and looted. We are trying to organise ourselves where it is still accessible. We put together delegations that go to see the chiefs, but also the belligerents on both sides.

Question: We heard that near Masisa one group of women was taken hostage on the road, looted, and raped for eight days. Everyone seems to think that's normal, since they were going from one territory to another to trade. No one seems to feel any obligation to protect them. What can you do?

Answer: We have no influence on the government in place, nor on those who say they represent the central government. I heard of the incident you are speaking of. That happened between Kasimia and Kikonde. Kikonde is a zone with a great wealth of food. People from Kasimia are obliged to travel there to get supplies. Sometimes you can pass unharmed. But if things deteriorate politically between the two groups, the problems begin. We put together a delegation and asked the chief to pass on our declarations to the RCD and to those who are in the bush. Sometimes they are children of the region who do that, and then with the chief of the village we have a chance. It's a long drawn out process, which cannot bear fruit straight away.

Question: All the governments of Congo today - and there are several - say they are there to serve the population. At the same time, everywhere we see that the population is suffering. What can the women of every ethnic group combined do about this?

Answer: Interethnic meetings do not happen very frequently in our area. In the Fizi territory, everyone has their own place: some are up on the high plateaux, others down on the lake shore. There is room for everyone, we can live side by side. I am sure that the Banyamulenge women have the same difficulties, but we have not yet made any move towards them. Here in Uvira, sometimes in professional meetings, we talk to each other and we mention the problem, but it does not go any further. Frankly speaking, the problems are not just between the Banyamulenge and the Babembe. In Fizi, there are the

Bafulero, the Babembe and the Banyamulenge. During the first war, it broke out as if it was only between the Banyamulenge and the Babembe. At the time, there was killing on both sides. But after the first war, we became aware of the fact that it was a revolution for the whole country. It was a question of overthrowing Mobutu's government. We agreed with that. We didn't know. We had killed each other for nothing. It was really a revolution.

Then in the second war, people did not flee as they had in the first war. In the first war, we were afraid of being exterminated by the Banyamulenge, but this time we said: "No! We can't leave our homes again and become refugees. We are staying put!" What makes people move, it's the attacks from time to time, armed groups killing each other. It has become a tribal war.

Question: How can all this be resolved?

Answer: We hear what people are saying in the streets, in the villages. They say: "You know, we can't have a problem with the Banyamulenge. If the allies leave, we will find an internal solution between us and the Banyamulenge." But what brings fear is that when the allies are there, our Banyamulenge brothers are in a position of strength. If the allies left, we would be obliged to find a solution, because the war has gone on too long, and we have lost many children. The population is afraid that the allies have come to carve up the country. According to the people, this is the justification for the existence of the Mayi Mayi.

Question: If we understand you right, there are several wars: the one that is taking place far away on a big scale, and the other at the local level, where villages are attacked by both sides, and no one cares for the people. In this war at the local level, even if it is influenced by the other war, is there anything you can do here and now?

Answer: At our level, we can raise awareness and educate the population not to go to war. When people understand that this war is making us waste our time and opportunities - even among the Babembe, Mayi Mayi are killing Babembe! In this whole coastal area, there are no Banyamulenge living here. These are Babembe, Bifulero, Banindu, Bavira, but they are all mistreated by the Mayi Mayi who say they are on the side of the central government. Perhaps it's the lack of education of these armed men. The population just has to suffer the consequences.

Question: Elsewhere in Kivu, people have told us of the problems of children who do not go to school, but go off to make war. What's happening here?

Answer: This is a very, very important question for the family, because it's true there are young boys among us who are not old enough for military service, but they are joining up. They are beginning to fight and kill people. This is a situation which is very worrying for us women. Our girls are marrying very young, and those young boys abandon them and go off into the bush and they are left widows.

Even in normal times, among the Babembe, girls don't get an education, but now it's worse. If I was able to study, it's thanks to the open-mindedness of my mother and father. It's an exception. We said we should open a secondary school for girls in Kasimia. We already had the buildings, but all that stopped because of the war.

Question: How do you Babembe women organise yourselves to survive?

Answer: Before the war, we had a programme of animal traction, using oxen. Unfortunately, most of those oxen have been eaten

by the fighters, we don't know which side they came from. With those that were left, we cultivated twenty hectares and distributed seeds on credit. We also gave out small credits for trade.

Question: Can you tell us a bit about the traditional role of the Mubembe woman and the strength which that could give her in the present situation?

Answer: I told you that we are a bit different from other regions. When you go up to Bukavu and further on, you find women who work at quite high levels in administration. That is not the case among us. You can't find any woman among us who has a position of responsibility. In the family, however, the woman has sole responsibility. That is her important place. Men can also come and ask her advice if things aren't going right in the community or the locality. It's not really official, it's sort of on the side, invisibly. We would like women to be recognised as official advisers, taking responsibility. But even today, women are consulted by the chief in certain areas at village level.

Question: President Kabila of the central government has just been killed. What does that mean for people?

Answer: We Babembe women, we are the population, and the population has not taken sides. The government which they will put in place, even if they change the government, we are ready to work with them. We are neither for Kabila, nor for the RCD. We want both parties to come to an understanding, and just let us get on with our life. You can't have a government without a population. We want then to stop fighting, come to an understanding, and let us work under just one master.

Round table discussion with representatives of the Women's Platform for Indigenous Development in North Kivu – PNFDE /Goma, North Kivu

Pole Institute wanted to know what women think about the present situation, and what strategies for survival they have developed. We met some representatives of the PNFDE (Women's Platform for Indigenous Development in North Kivu) and discussed the question with them. These conversations took place in September 2000 in Goma, at the office of the Women's Platform. Aloys Tegera and Christiane Kayser represented Pole Institute. The discussions took place in Swahili and were translated by Eddy Kikumbu.

Those present were:

- Marguerite Kibanja, coordinator of the Association of Women Farmers of Masisi
- Hadidja Pilipili, representative of the Association of Muslim Women of North Kivu (AMDI)
- Veronica Kahindo, representative of Women Traders (AMACO)
- Zawadi Wetemwami, President of the Sub-Platform of the Women of Masisi and Walikale
- Shamavu Buhoro, president of the Association of Women Retailers of Sambaza at Nzulo
- Aline Nziyavake, executive secretary of Femmes Plus, a women's association supporting women living with AIDS
- Faida Mufano, president of the Association for the Promotion and Action of Women for Development
- Marie-Jeanne Salokomo, vice president of PAFED in Kirotshe
- Justine Masika of UWAKI (Union of Women Farmers of North Kivu)

- Brigitte Mayisafi, vice president of LOKIMO (Loashi, Oosso, Kihira, Mokoto)
- Hadidja Anza Kameli, provincial president of the women traders of North Kivu
- Sarah Mirimo, urban president of the Federation of Protestant Women
- Bernadette Muongo, president of the PNFDE, coordinator of the Programme for the Support of Women Victims of Conflict.

Question: In this situation of ongoing crisis, how do you manage to work and survive?

Hadidja: My name is Hadidja Anza Kameli, I am provincial president of AMACO; that means, I am the leader of the women traders of the province of North Kivu. Looking at the climate in which we are living during this time of war, I must say that our work is not going well. Many traders have become poor. This poverty is a consequence of the war, because they steal our goods on the roads we travel by, and often we have bought these goods on credit. The trader risks even losing her land where she is living, to see it “confiscated”. Alas, I have very little influence; as the president, I am supposed to look after the interests of women traders in North Kivu, but I have no means to help them. Women who have lost their goods, and those living in poverty, they have no more capital to trade, there’s no one who can help anyone else.

What’s more, our children don’t go to school any more, our husbands just sit around like that, without work, and those who have work are not paid. Many live in rented houses, and they are evicted from their houses. There are too many problems.

Question: It’s true that the crisis is bringing many difficulties and the crisis will perhaps go on for a long time, but even before

it is over, we have to live. Today, you tradeswomen, how do you manage to make a living?

Hadidja Anza Kameli: We keep up the fight by selling the goods we have at home. If you bought a radio, you sell it for the capital to start a small commerce, even selling peanuts beside the road, because you mustn't have any false pride in your life. That's how we live, we remain very poor. In our home, there's nothing of value left; even our husband's watch, it's sold to get the wherewithal to live, with our children.

Question: Here I see many women from the interior, who have come to Goma. How did you come to be in Goma?

Brigitte: My name is Brigitte Mayisafi. I am a member of a women's association LOKIMO, and we work in agriculture; we learn how to build and how to raise animals. You want to understand the situation of the women who have come from the interior because it is too dangerous to live there. The Interahamwe torment and terrorise the population. And then, there are some young men up there who think they are nationalists, and they have gone and joined what we call the MayiMayi. Many of them joined up not to be bandits, but because they wanted to defend the national cause. The Interahamwe came and attacked these young men. The population is now the victim of this combat between the Interahamwe and our soldiers, between the Interahamwe and the Mayi Mayi. The population flees into the forest. And there the Interahamwe strike them. If they flee to the villages, our soldiers strike them, and consider them as the enemy. So the population doesn't know what to do: to be on the side of the soldiers who are presently in power, or to join the Mayi Mayi who say they are on their side, or to join the Interahamwe. None of these solutions appeared good to them, so they have fled to the towns, where at least they will be considered as neutral. That's why the

interior is empty, there are no farmers. For example the village of Kibirizi: everyone is here now. A sack of beans costs 20\$ instead of 10\$. Our members who were in the interior are now in Goma, because they are not safe, and they don't know how to stand up for their rights. The displaced are women, because the men are hiding in the forest. They are neither Mayi Mayi nor Interahamwe, but they hide there because they are afraid. They will die in the forest. The women who came to Goma will die of illness because they cannot afford to buy medicine; children have kwashiorkor - really, it's a problem.

Women's associations really don't know what to do about it, because our resource is the land. When our members cultivated and harvested beans, this was our activity. We have no outside support, and our members who contributed to support our associations are also here as displaced people. We are all at the end of our resources now. We wonder, can the association help the fugitives, or can the fugitives help the association to develop? We are stuck, we don't know how to continue.

In the field, some associations manage to teach some victims how to make soap, and if they make twenty cakes of soap, they go onto the roadside to try and sell them. She will sell them and maybe earn 1 franc or 10 francs, just enough to eat for one day and survive at the basic level. There are some who have found credit somewhere. They give this to the victims to sell flour, and after selling the flour they earn a little, but it is not enough. There are some like the women of Anamade who take care of orphans with their own meager resources; they work with those who have malnutrition; they look after the women who come from the interior, but their resources are minimal. The PFNDE and its office were actively supported by our associations when they were working in the field. Now that it's not working anymore, everyone has fled to the town, and the whole thing is blocked. We work for development by selling our clothes, a wrapper or a

watch, so that the thing can work, but these are the efforts of individuals.

Question: I see that there are many displaced people here in Goma, and I see no refugee camp. The families who are sheltering them, how do they live?

Brigitte: We are all living this experience. The people of Congo are not used to living under a tarpaulin. You will find that a family with six children has welcomed in a family with ten children. You will find a household with forty people to feed, and they manage by carrying loads on the road. That's the way people behave. Now we asked that the displaced people should be housed in camps (that's the story of Sake), because the resident families were overcome by the number of displaced people. So they built them camps, but the result was that the attackers came and attacked the displaced people in their camp and many were killed. Now such a situation causes fear. If an organisation wants to build a camp, people are afraid, and the population is afraid to go into the camps because they become a target for the attackers.

Question: You are talking about a camp for displaced Bahunde which was attacked at Sake. The Chief Bahati asked that perhaps, as people are coming back, the Batutsi coming back from Rwanda, the Bahutu should welcome them; is it possible after our people are victims of the attackers at Sake that they can manage to live together with the others in the interior, or will they all want to stay here in town? What do you think?

Brigitte: Perhaps we should go back a bit in time. Our platform that you see here, its original objective was to reconcile the different ethnic groups, because in our platform there are associations from all ethnic groups, and it has succeeded in bringing together women from all tribes, Tutsi, Hutu, Hunde,

Nande *et cetera* ... So from the side of the population, there is no problem. The question mark is over the politics at a higher level, there we see a big question which we cannot explain. Because if you look at the interior, that there are troubles, and yet people are coming out of the camps, the Tutsi, the Hutu, the Tembo and the Hunde *et cetera*... and they can live together. The population today has already had good experiences of living together. There was an association, Anamade, that gave us a field. We have this experience, we cultivated the field there at Mushaki, all the different tribes, we cultivated together without any distinction, with no problem.

Question: Everyone is suffering, all the groups are suffering. Do you think this suffering can bring people together to look for new solutions, or do you think that that is impossible?

Hadidja Pilipili My name is Hadidja Pilipili. Truthfully, people have never refused to get on together, and the thing that stopped people getting on together is politics. Those people up there at the higher level do not want to agree together, and set us an example. They are the ones who lead us, they brought this war on us. Otherwise, how do you explain that for a long time we have lived together, all the different tribes: we were born, we gave birth, we were always together, there was no difference. It's politics that has brought us these difficulties. It's not a case of someone choosing to say: "Who are you? I don't know you!" To find the explanation of all this, you have to start by meeting the politicians, that they look for the right way to lead us. We are like people without eyes, they tell us to go somewhere, and we go, but we can see nothing. Maybe we could fall into a hole, we do fall into it. Why? Because we have no eyes, our eyes are politics, politics and politicians. If they want peace, we will have peace. As long as the politicians do not want peace, the war will continue.

Sarah: My name is Sarah, I am involved in adult education. I am preoccupied by a very important concern. Since the war began, it's terrible for our children. There are many children, and their parents cannot send them all to school, and that just increases the percentage of those who will never be able to get an education.

International authorities have helped the schools, but I don't know if UNICEF and UNESCO really have the will to help Congo. Because the children have gone into the streets, there are an increasing number of juvenile delinquents. There is no way to look after them. We weep for the future of our children. What will the future be like for our country if in the nursery everything is rotten?

I am asking first for people to get involved in adult education to find how to encourage them. We do this freely as volunteers, we have no materials, no offices or classrooms, we do this in some zones where there is peace, where it's stable. But we weep for those places where the schools have been closed for six years. What will become of those people? How can the country move forward? Are we going to have a country of illiterates? That is my concern, and I am asking you to help us.

Question: Can you tell us what you do with your group?

Sarah: We do a lot, we Protestant women. We have several groups in North Kivu Province, based on churches. We take groups of men and women and young people who have not had the opportunity to study for a long time. But we don't know how to go on, because we have no assistance, we don't know how to go on because we lack the means and some of us have fled into the forest because of the war.

Question: We hear that Bernadette here works with women who are victims of conflict. Can you tell us a bit about this experience?

Bernadette: Women have become victims of this war because of the bad government of leaders who are not working honestly. They don't want to find ways to reach an understanding, and now it's the women who are carrying the heaviest load of this war: they become widows, they stay with the children, without work and without support, surrounded by orphans. The women don't know which way to turn, which path to follow. They are traumatised, they give up, they don't know what to do. They asked the politicians to reach an agreement so the problems can be solved, they ask for help to solve the problem of the future of the orphans.

We also have the experience of the victims of early marriages, wives who have become widows and children who have become orphans. The children cannot study well. And what's more, many of them have no roof over their head, and that leads them into bad behavior. There are many rapes: the women feel traumatised, life becomes difficult for them. They have a family to care for, and man take everything away from them, *kunianiasa*, looting them, that's the experience of many of us these days.

Marguerite: I have a small concern: it's not the first time that people ask us for these stories. We have already been asked to talk about these problems of the war. Now I don't know if this debate we are having here can bring us anything positive. Perhaps this will be like all the others who ask us to talk to them without the smallest result. Talk, always talk ...

Aloys: We understand your suspicions. For now, all we can say is that we want the voice of the populations of Kivu to be

heard, especially the women. If you yourselves express yourselves, we hope that that will have repercussions.

Marguerite: Women here are victims in many ways. Many are war widows, they stay with their children, they have no home, they have to feed and educate their children. The State which led us into the war is only concerned with buying arms and ammunition. They don't care about this population that they are liberating. In my case, I'm living in a rented house, I haven't paid my rent for three months, my landlord is asking me to leave his house. You don't know where to go with your children, the landlord brings soldiers and police. You have stolen nothing, the landlord knows you very well, he knows you are all alone with many difficulties. The children don't study any more, and yet it is so important that the children go to school. But the landlord brings soldiers and they throw you out of your house, the State throws your goods onto the street, the children are scattered; and in all that, it's the mother who suffers. If it's under Mobutu or Kabila or RCD, we have always been at war, because they steal our goods, they beat us, they rape us. Here in the town of Goma, there is not much security, but in Munigi chieftainship, there are attackers who come and take people away at night. The government does nothing about it.

But if there's a State, it must defend us. Truthfully, right now, we ourselves are organising ourselves to survive. For example, we Muslim women here in North Kivu, we have formed our association and we have helped the State by bringing food to the General Hospital, to the Prisons; we have taken in orphans, widows. We've been doing this for about a year, but to this day, no government representative has thanked us for it. When we were obliged to stop, no authority came and asked us why we were not continuing.

For myself, I have a small trade on the road to Rutshuru, I go out and buy charcoal. You should see the people there who make charcoal: the women in the heart of the forest, with their babies on their backs, carrying a 100 kg sack. Those who say they rule us, do they even see this?

Shamavu: My name is Shamavu Buhoro, and I am the leader of the women selling sambaza (little fish). In our town at Nzulo, we are in difficulties because we were under threat from the attackers two weeks ago. The Interahamwe came into our homes and for two hours they pillaged us, they took everything. If you didn't have any money, you were dead. They killed two men because they didn't have any money. The families were scattered, the children came here. The authorities knew about it, but they did nothing. That's what worries us: everyone is afraid, the attackers could come back. That's what it's like for us to live without peace. If there were peace, love would return. You must help us to find a solution, because we really don't know where to run.

Question: You are asking for help to find a solution. In the meantime, what can you do yourselves?

Brigitte: As the other women have said: we are living in this situation because of our politicians. To get ourselves out of this, we cry for help, we have to force our politicians in Kinshasa and Goma to sit down around a table. Those from Gbadolite and Kisangani must also take part, because we already have four Democratic Republics of Congo! When they want to talk, let them invite women, quickly; we want to be represented there. You know, men often are afraid to say things. They are afraid: "If I say this, they won't give me the post of governor." But we, the women, we're not looking to gain titles, we want to solve the problems and get on with life. I think there is no development without peace, you are right to insist on that: development and

peace go together. If we look for development without the authorities looking for peace, we'll get nowhere.. If on the day of harvest, the bandits come and steal it all, there won't be any development. But I insist on this, the day they call the politicians, women must be represented. I really can't understand how all those intelligent men, doctors, lawyers, economists of our political class cannot take into consideration the situation of the population.

We were afraid that our children would not take their State Exams, because that depended on Kinshasa. Fortunately, they have found a solution.

You outsiders, you can help us by bringing in finance for example, for small credits. But you must also help us to set up checks and balances to protect our rights. You must help us to speak out freely, so that we are not persecuted if we tell the truth.

Question: Here in Goma, there is the Intercommunity Forum (*Barza*) with representatives of the eight ethnic groups of North Kivu, but unfortunately there are no women members. How can you be represented?

Brigitte: For us, the platform is our representation. If there is a problem, we bring it here. Bernadette is also an advisor of the Barza and can represent us.

Sarah: All we are asking for is peace. We the population, in Swahili, they call us *bayatima*, that means, the father is dead and you stay alone with your mother, you've no father. A man who wants to take the widow woman will first show how much he values your mother. He will look after you, the orphan child; he will give you a place to sleep, food and drink, he will pay for you to study. The traders can get on with their work, everything will

be peaceful. This man will be a “daddy”, we will stay with him. But up to now, we have seen no man who is like a father, who would even give you a bit of sweet potato. The fathers we have known will give you a stone, and who can stay with such a father? We are waiting for someone who will give us bread.

Justine: I am Justine Masika. We created the platform to bring everyone together, all the ethnic groups. *Tunasikilizana sisi sote*. We listen to one another and get on well together. We women, we can carry the message of peace everywhere. We want the war to end. But those public enemies who live into the forest, they have wives, the politicians have wives and they listen to them. Today in Uganda, there is peace and it's women who fought to bring peace there. If we join forces, if we understand one another, it won't be easy, but we can impose peace.

Brigitte: I agree with Justine, but I want to add this: to take our message of peace out there, we need safe passage, and the material means to broadcast the message. But it is possible. The Campaign for Peace did that, we went with them and Mrs. Bernadette into Masisi zone. Unfortunately there was trouble, and we had to stop.

We also want to propose that you give us an opportunity to meet the women of Rwanda and Uganda, to know how they managed to extricate themselves from war.

Bernadette: We've been suffering now for two years. We've been asking for help from outside, and it doesn't come. Recently, I have become more interested in what we can do for ourselves to bring this war to an end. I don't know how, but I do know who is really profiting from the war. What strategies can we adopt to carry on with our lives? I am struggling so we can have the bare minimum to survive.

Sarah: We must also do something so our children can study. We must encourage the teachers, because if they earn nothing they will send the children away, and the parents won't be able to get them back into school. And then there's a great danger that the children will become delinquents and go into the militia.

Brigitte: Our main problem is that those bearing arms are making the laws. The peace we need, we won't find it, because it's armed men who are in charge, and they are always trying to spread suffering.

Hadidja: There's another thing: we are suffering very much from lack of information. We don't know what is happening at Kibumba, we've no idea what's happening at Keshero. Perhaps the women's platform can help us gather information that is more trustworthy than the rumours on the grapevine.

Bernadette: Yes, we can do that together, but it's a difficult and risky job. It's a way to build peace because people are in the dark, and many people can die in the dark, but when information circulates freely, at least we can understand a bit better what's going on...

Interview with women of the civil society of Kitshanga, Masisi, North Kivu

In mid September, we took advantage of a trip to Kitshanga in Masisi zone to talk to several women based in the agglomeration of Masisi. The meeting took place at the Nutrition Centre of Médecins Sans Frontières.

Those who took part:

- Elisabeth Mawazo, president of the GEFIS (support group for widows and women affected by disasters) at Kitshanga, also a member of CREDAP (Committee for the Renewal of Agricultural and Pastoral Activities) and organiser of the NGO ACODRI. She is in charge of the kitchen at the children's nutrition centre of Kitshanga.
- Annie Kavira, treasurer of the "Association of Women for Social Progress" (AFPS) and organiser of the nutrition centre.
- Bahati Kanyere, member of the Red Cross, assistant caring for children at the Nutrition Centre, a displaced person, former member of the rural Bashali collectivity group of "Women and Development"
- Kabuo Bihendo, from the group "Women and Development", working as one of the organisers of the nutrition centre
- Eugenie Masika, member of the group AFPS, member of the Association of Muslim Women, and a cook at the nutrition centre
- Aloys Tegera, Lyn Lusi and Christiane Kayser from Pole Institute.

The interview took place in Swahili and was translated by Eddy Kikumbu.

Question: We would like to know how in this crisis which has struck the region, you women manage to survive.

Elisabeth: Here in Kitshanga, the women are in a very difficult situation, they suffer greatly, because everything falls on us, we women have to do all the work. The men have no income because we have had to leave the hills and come here to the town. They are unemployed. This situation is hard for the women to manage. They have to feed the family, they even have to buy clothes for their husband. They have to work in the fields and in the house, they make great efforts to go a long way to market, carrying their goods; they do everything possible so their children can go to school. It's difficult, and it's a problem for us women.

Secondly, for development, we are really behind. We women are lacking many essential things to allow us to develop. And the widows: when the war came, the men were affected and the women are left widows with the children. Many of the people here are displaced people fleeing the war.

Question: What sort of war?

Elisabeth: It's an interethnic war. When the women arrived here, we saw that they were in difficulties and they had no husbands to rely on. That's why they got together to help each other, to protect each other. For income, we thought of cultivating fields for them so they and their children could have food, and after that perhaps start some animal farming. Our work has progressed slowly, since it's difficult to get into contact with the townspeople, because vehicles were no longer coming here. But at least our work is going forward today, we are harvesting a lot, and the animal farming is looking good. We received seeds from ACODRI, and FAO also helps us a lot, and all the village can cultivate fields, you can even have a vegetable garden to have something to eat beside the house. And we are also raising ducks and some goats that ACODRI gave us. But we have a problem because many women can't read. We

thought of starting a social centre so they can learn to read and to sew a little. We received some help from Save the Children, a sewing machine and some cloth, but there's no hall or room to work in. Men prefer to send their boys to school, rather than girls. Girls have a big problem: they can't study. There are many people with many needs here. There are many widows, also many displaced women whose husbands are elsewhere.

We don't have exact figures, one day we tried to count the women affected by the disaster, and before we came to the end of them we had counted over seven hundred widows here. But that was a year ago, and here the men die fast, so there could be more than a thousand.

Annie: Our group, the AFPS, is helping in particular to make soap. But it's difficult to finance the raw materials. One NGO, APREDECI, gave us a credit. When we sell, sometimes we cannot earn the total amount of the investment. Then we're in trouble. The day we have to reimburse, we are still making soap but we have gained nothing, we have made a loss.

Bahati: For us, we have no support. We try to ask the authorities, and today they are beginning to answer us, but we have no firm answer. There are many women, and they cannot read or write.

Question: Kitshanga used to be a small town, now it's a large agglomeration. There are many displaced people. Will people go back home? If not, why won't they go home?

Kabuhe: Because of the war, they think it best to flee in this direction and stay together. Here you see now the people from the hills, all the different ethnic groups mixed together. In the hills, there are the attackers chasing away the inhabitants. Then everyone comes here, there are Tutsi, Hutu, Hunde and even

some Nande. Everyone wants to go home, and some have already gone. If they don't fall into the hands of the attackers, then they stay. Some have even been back home a year. Some people whose fields and village are not far from here spend the night here; in the morning they go to their fields, and in the evening they come back to spend the night here.

Question: What is the security situation like here in Kitshanga?

Elisabeth: Here in town it is peaceful, but the problem that we have are the people who come from the forest, the Interahamwe from Rwanda. They are in the forest on every side, in no fixed place, they are everywhere. If it weren't for them, we would have peace.

Question: How can this problem be solved?

Bahati: The authorities have to decide, because we the population, we can't do anything about it. If we hear there is peace, we will be very happy, because today, traveling by road to Goma from Kitshanga is a risky business: we can find ourselves face to face with the attackers who steal our money and then kill us.

So we hope the authorities will continue to fight more effectively against the attackers.

Elisabeth: The CREDAP group that we work with said that to put an end to the problem of the attackers, we must work for peace. Without peace, there is no development. Women are well placed to work for peace. In places where a man can't go, a woman can go. Prostitutes can be our ambassadors for peace among those who are in the forest. But I don't know if this sort of woman can be found in Kitshanga. If you go out there to them in the forest, they won't let you come back again. But the

authorities must look at this problem of how to reach the people in the forest, to tell them that it's useless to stay there, that they have to make a move towards other people to live together. That really is the job of the authorities. If those people don't come out of the forest, there will be no peace.

Eugenie: In the meantime, here in town, we are protected by soldiers. The population cannot protect itself: we still need a group of soldiers, armed men.

Question: Here you have had armed conflict since 1993. But today, different groups live together. Can you tell me what happened?

Elisabeth: There has been war here since 1993; it was a war among ourselves, *sisi kwa sisi*. People have realised that it was senseless, and they have understood that war destroys everything. It gives birth to abject poverty. No one among us all has benefited from this war. So now we prefer to stay united and live together. Today a Hunde can go and spend the night in the house of a Hutu. And the other way round. People have understood that war is not good.

Question: What is the most important thing that you would like the people outside to know about you and about Kitshanga?

Elisabeth: We would like women elsewhere to think about us, the women of Kitshanga, so that we can move forward here. For example, intellectually, starting with the little girls, right through to old women, we must have our place, our rights. Women elsewhere must know that women here have a tough life: we are responsible for the whole family, the fathers are abdicating because of poverty. But at the same time, women's rights are not respected.

Here, women have not a word to say, the men are always the ones who take centre stage. We want women also to speak and we want people to consider what women have to say. Our message is this: that we the population, from all the different groups, we must at all costs be united in our diversity, this is an essential precondition for us to find peace.

Discussions with the Banyarwanda Congolese women repatriated to Kilolirwe, Masisi, North Kivu

At the end of December 2000 in Kilolirwe, we met three repatriated women who belong to the 10000 Congolese Tutsi who have come back to North Kivu, and for the time being are gathered at Mushaki (2000) and Kilolirwe (8000). They are:

■ *Kamaraba Rachel, born in Kolonge, married in Katoyi, who arrived in Kilolirwe on 20th July 2000, coming from the refugee camp in Byumba*

■ *Mukamusinga Dativa, from Gitovu, Matanda area, and originally from Munigi, in Goma Zone*

■ *Sikiliza Jacqueline, from Gitovu, Kadirishya*

The interview was conducted in Kinyarwanda, and translated into French by Aloys Tegera

Question: You have come from the refugee camps in Rwanda. Can you describe for me something about your exile and the difficulties you met?

Rachel: In the camps in Rwanda, we had food, but we were sitting the whole day from morning to evening with nothing to do. And when we heard that there was a beginning, a minimum of security back home here in Masisi, I decided to come back and cultivate and help build peace with the other populations there. Since we came back here to Kilolirwe, we began to cultivate, but while we were waiting for the harvest we were hungry. We have some very vulnerable groups among us, they are the children who were used to eating porridge regularly and here they have nothing. We also have the old widows without any support.

Another important problem is schooling for our children, who wander around all day. I hope there will be a solution for them.

Question: It's good to tell me about your difficulties here, but can I ask you about your time in exile?

Rachel: For a total of six years, I lived in refugee camps. The troubles in Katoyi began in 1993. In April - May 1996, I fled to Rwanda. When it seemed like things were calmer, I came back to Ngungu, but the calm didn't last long, and I fled again to Rwanda. I was in the refugee camp at Mudende when it was attacked, twice, in August and in December 1997. After the last attack in December, the Rwandan government took us to settle us in Byumba, and since then I lived in the refugee camp in Byumba.

We fled the attacks of the Interahamwe who were allied with the local militia here and they used to cut us in pieces. The attacks which sent us into exile have not completely stopped, but I have the impression that they are becoming fewer, especially because when we got back we found the local people who remained behind were organising themselves to strengthen security in the area. We will join forces with the local population, to strengthen these efforts for security, for all of us, and if God wills, I hope we will manage. The important thing is that we should work together.

Question: Can you tell us a bit about how you work with the local populations who stayed behind?

Rachel: The local populations here with us believed that they could collaborate with the Interahamwe and live at peace with them. But after the expulsion of the Tutsis in the region, these same Interahamwe turned against the local population that had welcomed them. They abused them and killed them. Today, the

local population has suffered just as we have, and that is why we work together to achieve security for all of us.

Question: And you, how long have you been in exile?

Dativa: I've been in exile since 8th January 1996, that's when I arrived in Gisenyi, Rwanda. Since then, I've followed the same route as the other Congolese refugees, who were settled into camps in Byumba, after our friends and families were massacred in Mudende.

Life in Byumba was relatively acceptable. We did not die, but we could not develop. We suffered from the fact that we could not cultivate a field. That's why I came back, so that in addition to the help we receive I could be able to cultivate a field in the hope that one day soon I would be able to feed myself. However, here in Kilolirwe, we have many material difficulties. The health of our children is endangered because of lack of food. We are preparing our fields, but we do not have any seeds.

Jacqueline: I have been in exile since 16th August 1997. We were hunted by the Interahamwe. First we moved to Mushaki. The Interahamwe chased us, and we went to Ndosho, near Goma, before crossing into Rwanda, where we were welcomed into the Congolese refugee camp at Mudende. It wasn't long before we were attacked by the same Interahamwe, twice in the camp at Mudende. After the second attack on Mudende, the survivors were collected in the transit camp at Nkamira before being sent to Byumba. Life in the refugee camp was not easy. We had to learn quickly to build a shelter, to cook in a tiny space, accept to be seen and treated as a refugee, and we did adapt, because we spent more than two and a half years in the Byumba camp.

Here in Kilolirwe, life is not rosy. We lack hoes and machetes to cultivate. We have no food, but some of us have hired ourselves out to the local population who give us a little food to eat, and sometimes some seeds, so that in the months ahead our situation will improve. Even so, some are destitute, lacking everything.

As far as security goes, I think that our first security concern is to find some food, and then secondly to work with the population we have met here to reinforce our physical security. Bad ideas can always be found among human beings, but seeing how we have all suffered, we have more to gain by learning to live together in harmony.

Question: What was the reaction of the local population when they saw you come back?

Rachel: I was in the group that was welcomed back by the late governor Kanyamuhanga Leonard at the frontier. A truck carried us here to Kilolirwe. The local population was waiting for us. They had prepared everything: the local peasant farmers had collected 80 sacks of beans out of their own reserves, there was also oil and salt, even cut grass to make our beds. When we arrived, the people of Rutshuru zone sent us two truck loads of colocase. The other populations around have continued to support us as best they can. We have received food from populations as far away as Gahira. We have good relations with the people here. We buy from them, and sometimes they even give us credit until the time we will be able to reimburse them.

Question: Some humanitarian agencies working in Goma hesitate to come to your aid on the pretext that they are afraid of the negative reaction of the local communities. When you speak about the way the population welcomed you, I wonder where these rumours come from.

Rachel: Even if the populations never fled, they could still be considered as if they had been in exile like we. The people who have a bit of food today are those who cultivated in the daytime and slept in the bush at night. That's the sort of people who collected food to receive us back. And besides them, there are plenty of others who are as destitute as we are. They have no food, no hoe or machete, no clothes: we are in the same situation. The help that comes to us, we try to share it with them. If today the humanitarians came to help us, we would also share with the other destitute populations, while we are waiting for our own harvest.

Question: Those who hesitate to come and help you consider that the populations coming back from the Rwandan refugee camps are Tutsis who were expelled from North Kivu. They are afraid of reawakening the hatred and exclusion which caused their exile in the first place, and they wonder if it is possible to live peacefully together again.

Dativa: At the present time, I can only answer you with what I see for myself. We share the little help we receive with the other destitute populations who remained here. When we go to visit our fields on the hills where we used to live, if night falls and we are obliged to find lodging on the road, the populations we meet are happy to welcome us into their homes and house us well. Here in Kilolirwe we and the local people visit each other, and so far I have seen no problems.

Question: Do you think the causes at the root of the exclusion risk arising again in the future?

Rachel: We fled from an alliance between the local populations and the Interahamwe who came from Rwanda. But today, I see Hunde people coming from Kahanga who bring us banana juice,

Hutu who come from as far away as Goriba in the forest who bring us colocases. Evil was done, some terrible things happened between us. But the fact that other populations come to visit us and bring us gifts, that is a sign for me that we wish to rise above the past and be reconciled, and that it is possible to strengthen security for everyone, and live in peace. The populations who stayed behind have also lost many family members, and I think that we would all like to see our sufferings come to a final end.

Jacqueline: All the ethnic groups here have suffered from this war. Be they Hutu, Tutsi or Hunde, they have lost many people, and no ethnic group seems to have gained anything by excluding others. It is this suffering which unites us all, and I think we should use it to build a lasting peace for us all. With the local populations who welcomed us back, we offer each other hospitality and often discuss the recent past and how to overcome it.

Dativa: The Interahamwe who hunted and killed us turned against the other local populations and massacred them. The question we all ask, is how could we have avoided this war which has left us all in mourning. Not everyone needed or wanted this war. That is why the local people are happy to see us come back.

Question: Here, staying together in Kilolirwe, you feel safe. What about the hills where you used to live?

Rachel: It's not completely safe. But along with the other local people, we are organising ourselves to see how we can reinforce our security. The fact that our children, with the children of the local population that stayed here are organising themselves to keep us safe, this makes me hope that peace is possible. The more so because the Rwandan refugees keep coming out of the

forest and they are taken back to their homes. The hard liners who want to stay in the forest and continue to terrorise us, they will be the real enemies of all the population of whatever tribe.

Question: The children who today are organised into local defense units, won't they tomorrow be the bandits who will turn against you, their parents, as has happened elsewhere?

Rachel: Our children are not soldiers. They come back home and live with us. We try to encourage them to remain responsible children. And if God wills, I hope we will succeed.

Question: Your local chief has just come to live among you, and life seems to returning to normal. What do you think of that?

Dativa: The chief does in fact live not far from here. During the meetings he organises, we put our heads together about how to strengthen unity among us. He has told us clearly that if we can manage to find unity among us, we will have found the key to solving the problems that have torn our region apart.

Question: What lesson have you drawn from these years of exile?

Rachel: Apart from the fact that we have all learned that exclusion leads us nowhere, we have also learned to organise ourselves into associations, to learn some skills, such as sewing, embroidery, weaving mats, and other handicrafts *et cetera*... We managed to make a little money with these products. That allowed us to improve the quality of diet for our children. Here in Congo, we would like to put into practice what we have learned, but we do not have the means.

Question: Listening to you speak, I get the impression that you were better off in the camps in Rwanda. So why then did you prefer to leave all that behind and come back into such difficult conditions?

Jacqueline: I left it all behind because I was fed up with being treated like a refugee everywhere I went. But even so, I have learned a lot from those years of exile, in particular the value of things. For example here the land is much better, but we are used to using it wastefully, whereas there in Rwanda, the land is not so good, but I was amazed by the harvests that the farmers could get from it. I chose to come back so I could farm, and seek for ways to reinforce our security with the other local populations.

Dativa: In the camps in Rwanda, we were relatively well treated, but we lacked one thing, that was the right to our own nationality. We wanted to come back home and look for security as far as possible with the other local populations. If we came back, it's because we wanted to reclaim our right to have a country and a home, like everyone else.

Question: Do the other populations now recognise this right to nationality?

Rachel: When we arrived here, there was a big meeting of the important people of this region. They were unanimous that it is our right to return to settle in our possessions and to work alongside the other populations that we find here. During the meeting, there was one important man from Mijanja who said that the armed militia and the Interahamwe were beginning to cut off the legs and arms of the people, telling them that they were making it easier for them to wear body suits. This man was really happy to see us come back, because for him, this was

proof that peace is possible. I can't imagine that he would want to see us sent away again to Rwanda a second time.

Dativa: When I fled to Rwanda, I did not flee the population, I fled from the Interahamwe from Rwanda who had come here to Congo proclaiming at the top of their voice that no Tutsi has the right to peace, that we are foreigners. This propaganda was supported by some local elements. But after we were expelled, the Interahamwe turned against those very people who thought it was right to expel us. They were massacred, others became internally displaced people, wandering here and there in their own country. In the end, we have all been destabilised in the name of exclusion, and perhaps this is a sign that we must now work towards unity, to rebuild this ruined country which belongs to all of us together.

Jacqueline: We came back from the camps in Rwanda on the invitation of the local population here who encouraged us to return, saying that the enemy who divided us no longer exists. So far, I don't get the impression that the people who welcomed us back are not sincere, especially since they have invested heavily in finding solutions for all of us together.

Question: What guarantee do you have that the war will end and that peace will return?

Rachel: Sincerely, I believe that the war will end and that life will be possible, because local populations who accepted to collaborate with the Interahamwe are exhausted and are the first to denounce them today. The Interahamwe are losing the support of the local people and our return has gently pushed those who hesitated and debated about their relationship with them. Those who remain in the forest are those who are afraid to return to Rwanda because of the massacres they committed. Our problem, it's not the local people who have always lived with

us, it's rather the Rwandan Interahamwe who more and more are becoming the common enemy of all the tribes.

Question: What message do you have for your compatriots who are still in the camps in Rwanda?

Dativa: Six years living in refugee camps in Rwanda have marked us with a major handicap: the mentality of recipients of aid. We have learned the habit of holding out our hand to receive, while doing nothing for ourselves. It's true we are hungry here in Kilolirwe, but the important thing is to look for a hoe and a machete to cultivate a field, and get out of the habit of holding out our hand. It's difficult, but my only message to my compatriots who are still living in the camps, is to come back to rebuild with others what can be rebuilt. Let them give up the life of a refugee and come and help our country get back onto its feet.

Question: When do you think you can go back to your hills?

Rachel: One of the important lessons of the conflicts since 1993 is that it is not good to live scattered far from one another. People who were lost were for the most part those who lived in isolated homes, who were vulnerable when they were attacked. We would like to build close together to start with, before security is reestablished over the whole region, and those who want to go back to live in the hills can do so later.

Interview with Brigitte Ngezayo, Goma, North Kivu, 30th January 2001

At the end of January 2001, we had a meeting with Mrs. Brigitte Ngezayo at her home in Goma. She explained to us her analysis of the situation and of the role of the woman in the region. The interview was conducted by Aloys Tegera and Christiane Kayser.

Question: Can you tell us how as a woman you are experiencing the crisis which we have been going through for the last few years?

Brigitte: To reply in depth to this question we would need a month! The situation we are living in now is really catastrophic. It is obvious that like all women here, this crisis is horrible for me. I have always lived here, and during these last few years I have seen a succession of events that have plunged this country into an unprecedented crisis. So I can state unequivocally that it is urgent to find a solution to get out of it, and if you don't mind during this interview I want to insist on areas that concern the role of the woman in general as educator, as the producer of human values in a society. Because I am convinced that you can find the roots of the crisis in my country in the fact that the teaching of values has deteriorated or been abandoned. That is the big hole in the vase containing the potential of this country. If we want success in our actions, we first have to attack this evil.

I was trained as a primary school teacher; education is by business. I taught for a few years but I could not make a living from it. So I had to join my husband in business. I wasn't able to continue teaching, but I've created several schools which I have followed from a distance. I've seen the education domain go

downhill in a frightening way, up to today. I tell myself that if we do nothing, it may be impossible to salvage anything.

What is it that deteriorated first? It's values. I often talk to women about it. Human, moral, traditional values, we've lost them over the years. And women have a role to play, and a great responsibility for this. Perhaps women as guardians of values have given up. All that is happening to us today comes perhaps from this loss of values.

Question: Can you place the contribution of the degradation of values in the overall framework of suffering of the population, and specifically the role of women?

Brigitte: It's true that women suffer like everyone else, if not more. And education, it's not as if there is none. We even have universities here, we have a Congolese intellectual elite who has been to the best universities, but what is lacking at the bottom of all that is values. Today, everyone knows that corruption is bad, but everyone does it. Why? The older generation, like us, we are still shocked because we were taught in our youth about the damage corruption could do. But imagine a young man born in the 70s. I talk about those years, because it's really during that time that we saw antivalues take root in our society. That young man, he grows up surrounded by it all. He goes to school and he knows that if he gives a bank note to his teacher, he will take home a good report card. No one tells him that's wrong. Corruption is so widespread in our society that even his father could not reprove him for it, even less his mother. That's where I mean that the woman in our society has abdicated from the education of youth. Even studies in the best schools with the best teaching materials will bear no fruit if there is no base and no foundation of values.

Question: What are these values that existed in the region, which were our cultural heritage and which are in tatters today?

Brigitte: You could also ask, what has made us worse than our ancestors. A hundred years ago, you would rarely find so many people who say they lost their case at trial for lack of money to bribe the judge. There would be practically no traditional chief who would publicly lie to his population or who robbed his population. If you have the time to listen to me, I'll tell you a little story about what happened to me and left its mark on me until this day. When I was seven years old, I was separated from my best friend and sent to a boarding school in South Kivu. It was a painful separation. Through the whole year I saved part of everything I was given in the hope that I could share with her the many things I had received. When the holidays came round, I didn't see my friend in the crowd that welcomed me back to the village, and right away I asked my mother. The explanation was that her elder brother had committed a theft, and the whole family had to leave the region, because the community wanted nothing to do with a family that sheltered a thief. Society was well organised. The law was respected and human life was protected. The family was sacred, betrayal was fiercely sanctioned. There was an important place reserved for a feeling of honor, honesty, trustworthiness. And in such a context, communities managed to live together in complementarity and perfect harmony.

That was at the end of the 50s. What do we see today? Impunity reigns everywhere. A mother hides the loot that her son has stolen from a neighbour. Human lives are destroyed by false accusations and lies.

Question: But living in a region that is naturally rich isn't our society also built on well concealed theft, which has become institutionalised and invisible?

Brigitte: To live in a region that is naturally rich is a privilege that every Congolese should appreciate. Unfortunately, one irresponsible government follows another, and they have prevented any socio-political organisation from emerging, which could be favorable to the development of communities. Antivalues were practically institutionalised. It's like building on shifting sand. We can build nothing here if we don't start by reestablishing values.

Question: But what is it that brought such a rapid change? What caused the perversion of all these values?

Brigitte: Things change little by little. First there was the ill-prepared independence. The first thing went wrong after independence: many Congolese thought that now we are independent we do not have to work any more. The Belgians imposed forced labour with whips, so independence for people here meant no more work. But love of work is a value. This antivalue, to avoid work, to fold your arms, that has remained to this day. Little by little, other antivalues have taken root. It's like a crack that grows imperceptibly wider until it's too late.

Impunity, and the absence of a government based on the Law, this means that over the years antivalues are in the ascendant and decadence has followed.

Question: It is certainly necessary to analyse how things have gone so badly wrong, and afterwards we can think about how to get out of this situation.

Brigitte: Absolutely right. I have given you the fundamental reason for all this. Now I am interested in knowing what to do to find a solution. I really don't believe I have any miracle answer, but I am convinced that raising awareness among women,

helping them to rediscover their primordial role as educator, mother, teacher, sister, centre of the family, will make a difference. That will prepare the child to enter school, to learn a trade, to build on solid foundations. If these foundations don't exist, even a hundred years of humanitarian aid will not move us forward. If the woman must educate, she herself must have access to education. Just now, Christiane was telling me that there are fewer girl students in the universities, many fewer girls in secondary schools, even in primary schools. It's true, the economic situation means that the little money available goes into education for the boys. This is not a good way forward. We have to find a way for girls to get an education. I think also that we could improve the quality of schools, include the subject of "Values" in the curriculum and the school books.

Question: It's an unquestioned fact that in this crisis, women are managing better than men. They are the ones who keep the households alive. What are their special abilities that could be reinforced?

Brigitte: Women do a multitude of things to survive. They have to. But from my point of view, one of the main priorities for women is still their role as educators. That does not stop them doing other things.

Question: The degradation of values is a worldwide fact. With the new roles that women are playing here, what new values can emerge, which correspond to the realities of the day?

Brigitte: It's true that values are losing on all fronts and it's very sad. Mothers must understand that if they feed their children this fruit, these antivalues, then they are in fact giving them nothing at all. And when they are no longer there, what will these children become? Firstly we are lacking a base, there's a big hole that we have to repair with values.

The rest will follow. You know, here it is possible to survive with what nature gives. The other day, they told me that our repatriated people, the people from Masisi who have come out of the camps in Rwanda and have gone to live in Kilolirwe, they are not getting thin, they are not dying of hunger despite the fact that there is practically no help for them. In this country, you will never have pictures like you see from Ethiopia. Just yesterday, I learned that that plant behind you has edible fruit. But the foundation of what can be done here is firstly values, and without them, nothing can go forward.

The tragedy here is this: for our young people, appearance is everything, not what you really are. When I talk to students, I understand that what counts for them is the diploma, and not what one is. And the diploma, you can buy it...

Antivalues are everywhere. Impunity is one of the greatest plagues. The other day, here just in front of us, my husband was swimming in the lake and he saw a woman raped by a soldier. He ran as fast as he could to help her, he tried to have the soldier prosecuted, but to this day without any result. Impunity reigns. Society accepts the rape of women, and many other crimes. Women will have nothing if they do not root out this evil. People have demonised the concept of the emancipation of women, but I always say to women that according to the dictionary, emancipation means freeing yourself. Women must free themselves from ignorance, they must educate themselves and know their rights and duties towards society and their people. They must take part in public affairs and make their contribution there. That's why they must be educated.

Question: But how can we achieve that in today's situation? There's a war now. How many women decided to go to war?

Brigitte: If the woman educates her children as she should, she can decide whether or not there will be war. You know what happens in this war? The elder sons went to the war of 1996, they went to Kinshasa. Now in 1998, there's a second war here, and the younger brother enlists to go and fight his older brother over there. Something's wrong here! But it's not just the one who takes arms who decides, it's also the one who tacitly approves. If the woman says nothing, she approves... Women must mobilise if they do not agree, women in Kinshasa, in Kivu and even those who are abroad. Women always have a role to play, and if they say nothing, they approve.

Question: This war has been going on for a long time. What can women do to stop it?

Brigitte: I can't speak for other women, I can speak only for myself. After the experience of the past three years of war, I think that war is not a solution. By force of arms, they have managed to go nowhere. We are still where we started, fighting. That could go on for twenty years, even fifty years. As a woman, I oppose war. I want to work for peace right now, and I am going to start in my own family, in my circle; I am going to do everything possible so people to get on with each other. In fact, that is what I am doing. If every woman does this in her neighbourhood, we will all turn towards peace. If someone doesn't know what to do, that person can start by identifying in himself what is bad and abandon these attitudes of hate. That would already take us half way down the path. We have to develop a new culture.

Question: There are those who say that this war is mostly influenced by people from outside and not by the Congolese, that this war could stop tomorrow if those outside wanted it to stop. What do you think? In order to work for peace, we have to also analyse where the war comes from.

Brigitte: Either these people have a very short memory, or else they have a selective memory for what is to their advantage. It is very difficult for a foreigner to get up one morning, shoulder his rifle and make war on you. You have to also look back a bit, to the time before the outbreak of war.

How did we behave towards those foreigners? That is what we have to look at. We haven't always behaved well. In any case, we brought this upon ourselves, firstly by maintaining a shambles of power for a long time, bad government, maintaining these antivalues I was talking about. For example, attacking peaceful villagers in Mulenge and Masisi, killing their cattle, talking of goods with no owners, expelling some of them. They probably thought that these people would go away and no one would hear of them again, and that we could stay here in comfort. And now, to explain this war, they want to forget that part of the story and begin with the reaction! No! To rebuild, really, we must recognise those mistakes and not repeat them. Myself, I think the Congolese themselves have much complicity in this war. It would be dishonest to try to find a scapegoat somewhere else.

Question: You spoke of bad government. What would be good government, and how will we get it?

Brigitte: Of all the systems I have seen, democracy seems to work best. It can take different forms in different countries but to have good government, the population has to participate. For example, for the interviews for "Regards Croisés" you listen to people and get them to participate. Without the participation of the population, there will be no good government.

Meeting with women from the 8th March Committee in Butembo, North Kivu

On 31st November, we met some Nande women in Butembo, to talk to them about their situation. They each represent one of the large organisations or networks of women in the far North. They organised themselves together as the 8th March Committee. They are:

■ Sabine Kasivika, COTEDER: Technical Advice for Rural Development

■ Céline Nzolire, AFPSC, Association of Women for Social and Cultural Progress

■ Georgette Kibendelwa, AFPSC

■ Luthgarde Sambo, IFED, Integration of the Woman in Development

■ Therese Kavuo Vanayeko, President of the Association of Women Traders of Congo (AMACO) Butembo

The interview took place in Kinande and was translated into French by Professor Kisangani Endanda of Pole Institute.

Question: What can you say about the present crisis?

Thérèse: What can I say about the crisis? It's a very deep one and we the women are the most affected. But this does not discourage us at all. You see how the women are carrying vegetables, leeks, from Magheria to come and sell them on the market here in Butembo. It's hard, but they've been doing this for a long time to earn a living, to feed the family and send the children to school. If there is a crisis, it's not because people don't work. But after so much effort to make their sons study, the women here cannot understand how their sons can become the "wives" of other men like them, such as Museveni and Kagame. It's a real scandal.

Why do these politicians continue to ignore the voices of the mothers who nursed them, and who have often warned them that they had entered into an infernal alliance? Since you men are incapable of leading the country, let us women do it.

Listen: in the plenary sessions in the hall of the FEC, we asked the question to know what was the monthly income into the public treasury. They told us without shame that it was \$400000 US. We then asked them if they couldn't divide that in two, half for the running costs of the state machine, and the war since they like to fight so much, and the other half to repair the road to Kisangani, so that businessmen who create the income can operate in Kisangani. They seem to take no notice.

Right at the beginning, they told us they went to look for allies to help them to fight. They used this illustration: "When a thief threatens to break into your house, you call your neighbours to chase him away." But would I need neighbours if I had children, and if I fed them well so they would be strong enough to stand up and chase away the thief? And if some of my children started fighting among themselves, what's stopping me from waking up their big brothers to separate their little brothers who are fighting, instead of going to find the neighbours who can come and sow trouble, and take our goods and kill us?

So that's the origin of the crisis in my opinion.

Sabine: It's very sad. Politicians make us ashamed the way they run after money. Women work to exhaustion, even to getting humps on their backs, so that those people can study. After that, how can they tolerate being led, dominated, by some foreigner, while they have sons, and they have crawled in the mud so they can study well? There's no difference between now and the time of colonisation; and the Belgians, even though they helped themselves, they at least paid salaries!

Georgette: After we have stuffed the heads of our children with so much knowledge, the foreigner comes and takes all our wealth, and our own sons even help them to grab what they can! It's past belief.

Luthgarde: After accepting to be the "fools" of the foreigner, they endanger the lives of their younger brothers who are left behind in the village by recruiting them into the army; or if they can't stomach that, they become mai-mai in the hope of chasing out the foreign armies. So it's the leaders who create the mai-mai, and at the same time the soldiers: two groups of brothers fight and kill one another, they are divided into two camps. The Nande people are going to disappear. All this seems to be ordered from outside, but executed by our own children. We are growing old and the young people are dying.

Question: But will the young people blindly follow this logic?

Thérèse: Everything starts with the parents. Our own parents told us we had to be careful with the Rwandans. Perhaps there's a well prepared plan to eliminate our people, with our own politicians as accomplices, and they put this plan into effect either consciously or unconsciously.

Sabine: Our intellectuals and leaders are not working like educated people. Our grandfathers who showed us the way did a good job and we reap the benefits to this day. But today's leaders with their big diplomas seem to be inferior to our grandfathers. Even the road that our grandfathers marked out is disappearing.

Kisangani: But isn't it often the case that in a family where the father is a drunkard, there are often children who adopt an opposite attitude to their father's? That is to say, that the

children of tomorrow will not necessarily follow their seniors whom you consider dangerous and lost. You must also consider that leaders, too, can make mistakes ...

Thérèse: That may be so. But the Congo, she's like a beautiful woman that everyone wants to take to bed. If you marry such a beautiful woman, what will you do? We can see that that is our real problem. You can watch her as much as you like, there will always be the risk that someone will take her when she goes to market or to the spring. Can you tell me what you the husband will do when you've married such a woman?

Kisangani: I would try to win her confidence. And then she is also a responsible person who must know that she has decided to be married to a man...

Thérèse: I gave that example because of the importance of the commitment. The man and the woman must agree together clearly that they will be faithful. In the case of Congo, if the leaders were faithful to Congo, the foreigners would find no one to use or send on their errands. The leaders then must know that they are married to Congo, and have no right to be unfaithful. But young people today quickly become unfaithful at the sight of money, the bait of gain: someone proposes ten thousand dollars, and that's already plenty for most of the leaders today. And yet some of them had important posts, but they preferred to start a rebellion so they could have more. Why can't they be satisfied with what they already had?

Georgette: You said that the leader can make mistakes. That may be so. But some people deliberately make "mistakes", even while they are told clearly that this is a mistake. Once in power, a leader often takes no more notice of the grass roots, or of the advice of those who are no longer his courtiers. He thinks he's

already dancing with the angels in heaven, and he is convinced that he will never come back down to earth again.

But if he turns a deaf ear to what is said at the grass roots, he will fall into a trap, and unfortunately he will drag us down with him. That's what makes us so angry. What sort of man will not listen to advice, not even from the mother who nursed him?

Thérèse: It's even you intellectuals who teach geography to our children and teach them about borders, different countries, different capitals *et cetera*. How can you tell me later that there are no frontiers, and now our politicians trot off to Kampala to find the solutions to their contradictions, and to decide what happens to us here at home?

Céline: As the others have said, the fault is not with the neighbour, but with our own children, who let themselves be used by anyone, who go anywhere like whores. Those dissatisfied people hunting for positions can only be easy prey to foreigners who find them offering an easy road to fulfill their ambitions. It's true that you can make mistakes. But when the war began, even the illiterate quickly understood that nothing was clear and that there was something wrong with bringing back people who had been used by Kabila, or who had used him, and that he wanted to send back home. Can the leaders still say they made a mistake, when the people they lead had already seen it was wrong a long time before?

Thérèse: Right at the start of their adventure, Zaidi Ngoma, who was then the President of RCD came here to incite us to send our children for military training. During a meeting at the *Auberge Hotel* we told him this:
"Before you, Kabila asked us the same thing to get rid of Mobutu. We gave him our Paluku (first son), we gave him a lot of food, thousands of cubic metres of fuel, a lot of money. A few

months after he's taken power, you come asking for our other sons. If we give you their little brother Kambale (second son) who remained behind, they will have to fight against their older brothers, killing their own brothers, and all that just to put in place some chiefs who send their own sons abroad, while they kill ours. Isn't it the case that Kambale will kill Paluku during these battles?

You who've learned to count, how many children are there in the belly of a woman? We too would have liked to send one child to study law at the university, another to theological seminary, another for medicine, *et cetera*. You want them all to be soldiers, to die for you!"

That Zaidi Ngoma at least had the courage to resign later. But after taking our children down with him in his adventure, he left them there! Honestly, these politicians...!

Céline: All of that is a lack of maturity in our leaders. These people come in 1998 with armies. We ask our own people who are in the army what is happening. They tell us: "We are going to get rid of Kabila. We are with the great powers to get rid of him." That's fine, but what problem did the Americans have with Kabila? They tell us he was incompetent, that he can't be the leader of Central Africa. Now we wonder how the children of a family can allow themselves to be convinced by the father of another family that their own father is not the husband their mother should have or the father they need. We criticise the Congolese leaders involved in this rebellion for their lack of political maturity.

Luthgarde: Yes, and we condemn them for their opportunism.

Georgette: As you are a university professor and a man like them, perhaps they can listen to you. Tell them that

unemployment doesn't necessarily kill you. One of them has resigned. He is here. His family has not died. Let them not be ashamed to resign.

Céline: Even so, I refuse to accept that these people resign after they have accepted to be accomplices in this war. They must first take part in the effort to restore peace.

Sabine: Let them understand that they must first get their act together and listen more to people at the grass roots, discuss with them and not just act according to the first idea that comes into their heads, or whatever their allies or self-seeking courtesans suggest to them.

Thérèse: Yes, let them know that the solution to their problems is not in Kampala or Kigali, and that we are not short of ideas. We uneducated people, we cannot understand how the intellectuals of a rich country, with many competent brains, mothers and fathers who are wise and well organised, how can they convince themselves that in Rwanda or Uganda, less blessed with resources and capital than we are, that there is the light for our problems in Congo? They are like children who leave fine tasty dishes on their table and go begging from their neighbours.

Luthgarde: Aren't they a bit retarded, these men? Aren't they leaving their comfortable beds with mattress, clean and perfumed sheets, prepared by their wives, to go and spend the night on a mat on the ground with a loose woman! Aren't they behaving like this in the political world? You see them in suits telling us: "We're going to Kampala! We're off to Kigali." And they leave the other Congolese behind who could help them advance more. In fact, aren't we at war? Yet we send oil, bananas, minerals mined by our own hands to Rwanda and Uganda, while our own activities are ruined by the war. Really,

it's time we women were included, and that the civil society should be heard.

Sabine: Really, we wept over the tragedy of the town of Kisangani, where foreign troops, Rwandans and Ugandans played at total war over our town, like it has never been seen in Africa before: 6200 bombs in six days on houses where they knew people, families, were living, on schools where they knew there were students and teachers, taken by surprise by a war which was never declared. But how many of our so-called Congolese leaders in the rebellion raised their voice to denounce this? Alas, some of them were even proud of it and said they had won a "victory".

Question: Now that we have looked at everything that's going on. what do you propose for a solution? How do you think we can get out of this crisis?

Luthgarde: Firstly, the rebel leaders must free themselves from their godfathers. Let the government in Kinshasa and all those rebels sit round a conference table to tell each other what they reproach each other for, and to organise the government.

Céline: They have designed a framework for these people to confer: the national dialogue according to the Lusaka agreement. But I have read this agreement. It's true they talk about a cease-fire and we need that. But I don't see any link in this agreement between the war and the nationality question. If every tribe must go to war to place one of its own people as President, there will be more than four hundred wars. Another problem is that according to this text, the Congolese are going to confer while foreign troops are still on the national territory, and therefore they will possibly be under pressure from these foreigners.

Question: if we come back to the local situation here, what can be done, in your opinion, as a woman?

Thérèse: We really don't know what we can do while we are under the heel of the foreigner. Even in the everyday areas like roads, the Virunga Park, or business, you can try and get organised, but those who are in armed power prevent you. Firstly, that Ugandan army is full of undisciplined elements, and they put the life of our population in danger. In the south of Lubero Zone, those Ugandans refuse to fight against the Interfaçage, the Rwandan militia, when they go and tell them that those people have attacked a village. They don't want to attack those militia that they consider to be refugees. They even prevented the population from getting together to set up their own local self-defense force against the Interahamwe!

Sabine: If our local politicians could leave us alone and let us get on with our own development work and education of the masses on security, it would be a great step forward. Because it's this work which will make people understand reality and bring people to a stage where they will not be deceived again or get involved in useless mai-mai movements which are the real source of insecurity in the rural areas. And through this work we can bring the questions and ideas of the grass roots up to those who say they are the leaders of the people.

Question: In other words, your work is consolidating civil society by reinforcing the role of the woman. But are the women here sufficiently organised to perform this task?

Sabine: We have always been doing this sort of work, and recently for the last few years, we have taken advantage of the International Day of the Woman to mobilise thoroughly the women in the rural areas right down as far as the Lake. That gave us the opportunity to set up the Committees we are calling

8th March Committees, which are a sort of network and mobilisation centre. This has reinforced the understanding between women, and between women's organisations which goes beyond ideological differences. Even women associated with the RCD are with other women in this. Ten years from now, we will have done a lot for the future of this area. But the men, the authorities, do not willingly allow us to go forward.

Thérèse: For example, during the Mass for the 8th March International Women's Day, the people in power and the Ugandan army tried to kidnap the woman who read the message to women which was prepared for the occasion, and also the women who were supposed to have drafted the message, which we thought was a very moderate message.

Sabine: In any case, there is too much confusion. It's absolutely essential that our political leaders confer together and act in favour of the population.

Interview with Theodisie Kasivita from the NGO UWAKI in Butembo, North Kivu

On 30th November 2000, during a visit to Butembo, we interviewed Théodosie Kasivita, who represents one of the large NGOs of rural women, UWAKI (Union of Women Farmers of Kivu, North Kivu). The interview was conducted in Kinande and translated into French by Professor Kisangani Endanda.

Question: Can you please explain to us first the work you do?

Answer: Thank you. I am a member and agent of UWAKI. I do mostly field work with associations of peasant women for exchange of views, training *et cetera*. You know that UWAKI is a development organisation supporting peasant women to improve their living conditions. It is active particularly in the areas of training for women in anything concerned with her agricultural activities, animal farming, management of the environment, health and protection of mother and child. We associate all our training initiatives with civic and political education about women's rights. We have been working in the far north since 1986, from three main sites: Kanyabayonga, Butembo and Beni.

Question: You seem to be very active in the field. What resources do you have to carry out your programmes and meet your objectives?

Answer: We have two main sources of funds. Firstly, we are self financed by payment of dues from the member groups, and receipts from our own activities, in particular, the village food depots in our main sites - we sell this food. And then there is support from different partners who participate on one or other of

our projects. Unfortunately, several of our activities have been paralysed during the recent wars, the so called liberation wars: the AFDL war and the RCD war. In fact, all our economic life is practically paralysed. The attacks by armed groups and forces (all these different fighters, the Interahamwe south of Lubero, the Mai-Mai all over the place, and the Ugandan rebels called NALU in the Rwenzori mountains on the border) they all destabilise the peasant groups and their rhythm of life.

Question: Since the wars, how are your relations with your partners developing?

Answer: Firstly they reduced their involvement and then they almost stopped altogether, because of the insecurity, they said. Apparently, some of the partners are considering starting again, seeing the recent visits to the field from their delegates, to find out what has happened to us.

Question: How has your organisation survived without your partners?

Answer: We continue to manage with our own meager local resources, with our own intelligence and energy, especially to maintain contact and give mutual support to peasant women's groups, to support those who are most affected by the human catastrophe of war: the displaced women and families, those who have been looted of everything they own, those who have been brutalised, whose rights have been violated. We have understood that this is the time when we most need to stand united for the survival of everyone.

Question: But what explanation do women offer for this crisis that has paralysed them in their progress which had got off to a good start?

Answer: For the women in the far north, this crisis cannot be explained or at least it is difficult to understand. That's why the woman is asking where this crisis comes from. She lives passively through it; it is imposed on her. Where does it come from, how will it end, where will it take us? All these are questions that she is asking and that have no clear answer for her. You could say that it is a sort of madness that has suddenly seized the men.

Question: If women can't explain the crisis, at least they can describe it. How do they describe it?

Answer: For women here, this is more an economic than a political crisis. In fact, the causes cannot be found here among us, the actors in the war are people from outside who come here for economic objectives. They are aided and abetted by nationals who really don't know what they want, at least if we judge by the explanations they keep trying to give us on the local radio stations. And what's more, they fight among themselves over leadership and power, and for us here the quarrels are encouraged by the Ugandan authorities. Each faction has his own army or his own Ugandan officer, a sort of little war lord. The most striking example is the way they put in place a certain Lubala who reigns over a little territory in Bafwasende, an initiative of the Ugandan officers who control the production of the mines. The future of our country is not on their agenda.

So you can describe the situation as a situation of looting of the resources of our country. If it were a political crisis, we would already have found a solution. It's obvious that the actors do not want there to be a solution, so they can continue looting the resources. The proof is that for any local problem which could be easily solved here, our so-called leadership has to, or maybe they think they have to, run off to the Ugandan authorities, who

make the problem as complicated as they like, to serve their own interests. The worst is that for a little problem like fixing prices or repairing the roads, they had to go to Uganda to get permission of some sort. It's absolutely ridiculous.

All of this just makes families poorer: prices are rocketing: a bucket of beans that used to cost anything between 1\$ and 1,5\$ now costs more than \$3.

Question: If the crisis is caused by external actors as you say, are the local actors then innocent?

Answer: I've already said they have been used: they are puppets who don't know what they are doing; but they seem to have their own strategies that the woman cannot see clearly, because for her, she doesn't see what that has to do with the survival of the family and the peasant population, who are absolutely paralysed. Soon it will be the same in the towns and the cities. Perhaps it's unemployment that takes them down that road of dependence, in the hope of finding something, a position or a job, money or power! Some local economic operators are benefiting from the crisis. Anarchy benefits some as it also benefits those in the political arena who can steal from the public treasury, who don't pay the civil servants, nor even their own soldiers. But many are suffering horribly from the situation.

Question: The woman no doubt doesn't stand by with her arms folded in front of all this. How are women managing in this crisis? What paths of action have been developed by UWAKI?

Answer: The situation is very difficult, with activities more or less paralysed in several regions. Population movements have complicated the situation further. It is difficult for them to continue with their agricultural activities. The different fighting groups attack and loot the villages and farms: the so-called

regular armed forces arrive and chase the population towards the main roads, on the pretext that that way they can better control the movements of the armed groups. So the peasants abandon their fields.

We have developed a certain number of strategies:

- we provide moral support to the population that are struck by the catastrophe by staying by their side, and by being there, we give them hope again;
- we promote crops with a fast growing cycle to improve as far as possible their food security;
- we are an interface between organisations for humanitarian intervention and the families affected by the catastrophe, who are now several thousands in this densely populated part of the country. I'm meaning for example World Food Programme, German Agro-Action, CAFOD (Catholic Committee for Development) and others. They supply food, seeds and other sorts of help, but all of it is insufficient in comparison to our needs. For example, we have taken steps for action against the epidemics which have broken out in various places here;
- we organise different meetings, where we have brought in representatives of women's organisations elsewhere, for example, from the south of the Province, who have a longer experience than we in questions of survival management in a situation of ongoing crisis. That's what we did at our last General Assembly of UWAKI.

You have to recognise that even if she is displaced, the woman here continues to be remarkably active, so her family can survive in the new site where they have to live: she works, she sells her services, she does everything she can to start a little business, *et cetera*.

The paradox is that sometimes the populations affected by a catastrophe see us as accomplices of their tormentors, because

they have the impression that we are not doing much to get them back home where they usually live. That's hard for us, because there's nothing we can do about it.

For the woman who is not displaced, or who lives in the towns - because there are many towns here - we have encouraged small businesses to survive, like market gardening, small animal husbandry, small trade, supplying towns with food stuffs from peripheral markets. Obviously, ambushes are numerous, and victims too, but the women have not yet given up.

Question: Hearing you speak, population movements in this mountainous area with a high density of population must cause countless problems that people are not aware of?

Answer: That's true. One example is that almost all the development NGOs in the far north are involved in a process of redistribution of dense populations, by resettling families in open land in Beni or Lubero zones where the density is less, mostly to the west in the forest regions, but also near the axis of movement for the armed groups (from Bunyakiri in South Kivu to Walikale and Lubutu through Masisi and Rutshuru; these are the points of contact with Rwanda, the origin and final destination of the Rwandan armed militia). These resettlement areas are the most affected by the attacks and the people have fled high into the hills with all the attendant problems that creates for the present and the future.

Question: All this activity requires organisation and additional capacity. In the present crisis, what are women's organisations doing about this, in particular, UWAKI?

Answer: Our strategy is to organise workshops for brainstorming about its implications for peace making, because we have seen that since the beginning of the crisis, it is only the

men who are deciding things; and we are there like simple victims. We wonder what the men are doing! We want to be associated to the search for solutions, because, in the end, neither we women, not the men, no one really understands what's going on: what caused the crisis, what are its foundations *et cetera*. We believe that through the workshops, the woman can perceive the scope of the crisis, because we don't really know the components of this crisis. And we believe that if for example we had the means, we would like to exchange ideas with other women, especially the women from the other countries involved in the war, all of us, as the givers of life, as those who must at all costs preserve peace, and in that way preserve life. Then we will know where this war comes from, our reciprocal views of the war, what we can do to bring an end to this crisis. From time to time there are some who try to define this crisis, but each one has his own interpretation, and that makes it more obscure and hazy. That is why exchanges and dialogue between women would be useful.

Question: In connection with these exchanges, do you have any concrete strategies to suggest?

Answer: For these dialogues, for example, we could exchange ideas about how to promote peace. It would be like a seminar, for example, to know the causes, because we cannot find solutions if we do not know the real and active causes. In our view, the woman, once she has a better grasp of the causes, is well placed to lobby authorities in all the countries involved in the war here, including the Congolese authorities.

We have to fight to strengthen the position of the woman in the respective civil societies, which also need to be reinforced.

In fact, up to now, those who are lobbying the authorities are foreigners. But we do not know what their objective is. These

foreigners can say that they are going to contact the Burundian, Rwandan, Ugandan authorities to look for solutions; but is that their real mission? But we should be doing that ourselves among us Africans, between the people involved in the war; that would perhaps be more honest.

Question: Do you think that the forces of the civil society can influence the political forces?

Answer: Yes. We have to strengthen the civilian logic in order to get away from the military logic. You can talk about dialogue, but those who will take part in this dialogue must know what this war is made of. Does everyone see this crisis in the same way?

Question: That's all very well. But the woman here, is she sufficiently organised and equipped for these exchanges, for this conquest of a higher social capacity? What are the women's organisations doing to strengthen this capacity?

Answer: On this question, UWAKI has started a project which we call SYFEBEL (Synergy of Women in Beni and Lubero) financed by a Canadian NGO (CECI) which seeks to develop female leadership capacity. When we analysed the problems of women, we noticed that they were not always well organised. There was divergence. So we programmed training sessions on:

- planning and management of micro-projects ;
- lobbying and communication;
- the duties and rights of the woman oriented towards a consolidated civic, political and legal education;
- gender and development.

We believe that through this we will "enable" women in leadership, in lobbying, and in managing their associations. We choose women who are already demonstrating leadership capacity for dynamic development. Once "enabled", the woman

can first apply what she has learned to her husband, her friends, her sons, and later to the authorities, *et cetera*.

For this training, we have associated everyone, including other women's associations: because other women's groups are also organising themselves, for example the women traders in AMACO, the fish saleswomen in CODEPOL, *et cetera*.

Question: Women traders who are also considered wealthy and therefore autonomous, do they get actively involved in the defense of the female gender?

Answer: Yes. At first, we thought they were indifferent. But we have recently had proof that this is not so, when the Ugandan army threatened and arrested some of the leaders of the Development NGOs accused of having asked questions that were too daring. The women traders mobilised to close the market, and demand the freedom of the DNGO women who were in danger of disappearing like certain men.

Question: What are your hopes for the future?

Answer: As a Christian woman and a development worker, it is my duty to be hopeful. I am not pessimistic. I believe that God will send us a "Moses" who will lead us. Otherwise, in this anarchy that we are experiencing, we wonder who can help us get out of the mess, especially when we see that the great powers and the international agencies don't seem very keen to resolve our crisis and end the war. I think that the great powers are behind this war. I also have the impression that this war is particularly centred on Beni and Lubero territories, and that the rest of Congo is not targeted as much; that the crisis is worse here than elsewhere, with all this political intrigue spread widely at the local level. We don't know who to call on to demand peace

Question: God helps those who help themselves. What can be done?

Answer: First, we must analyse the context to be able to identify the paths to a solution. We do not understand well the reasons that set off this war. Some say they have been excluded, but we don't see things that way. As far as the government goes, we were fed up with Mobutu's rule, and he had to go, we were still in the process of observing Kabila's; and now those very people who were working with Mobutu (of all tribes), others with Kabila to set up his dictatorship, now they are telling us incomprehensible stories while all the time they are the cause of our misery.

That's why we need an thorough analysis of the causes and of the situation, with the accent on its economic aspects, to avoid false solutions which will not end the war... And then, the grass roots need to be involved in looking for solutions. It must not always be the same people who tell us this day they're going to Lusaka, the next day, I don't know where ... Whether they are going to Rwanda, Uganda or Congo, they do not know and they do not experience what is happening

Question: ... and the national dialogue?

Answer: National dialogue! But we have no leaders worthy of the name who could go and dialogue, no leaders who can validly represent or speak in the name of the grass roots, not those people who let themselves be led by the looters of our country's wealth, or those who are fighting for their own country and not for the good of Congo. If those are the ones who must go to the national dialogue, then they must first be educated and "enabled" so that

- they know their role and their duties as a leader: a politician must be able to defend his country and his compatriots, to defend the sovereignty and integrity of his country and the well-being of his population,
- they know that they must defend human rights, and not allow their compatriots to be deported or thrown into underground holes here at the airport instead of being put in prison, nor allow them to be simply killed like animals. How many people have lost their lives because they do not have a leader capable of defending them? Here they even killed the mayor, and no action was taken against his assassins! There are thefts, looting, rape ... They take people away. You even see foreign soldiers taking the microphone at the radio station and starting to give orders in civilian and political matters. Where there are leaders worthy of the name, that is not possible. We have no defense, we are at the mercy of a military power.

In the future, we will have to develop mechanisms to identify leaders; we have to strengthen civil and political education from the primary school, especially education about democracy and human rights.

Question: What are your fears for the future?

Answer: As a wife, I am concerned about the slaughter of the men. There are so few of them left. As a mother, I wonder what the future of our children will be like when they are recruited into the militia and the army. They should establish and respect an age after which they can recruit. And what will be the future of those thousands of children malnourished because of the war and the displacement of populations?

As an educator, I am very worried about the way a culture of killing is taking root among us, imported from elsewhere. In our tradition, when we learned that someone had killed someone

else, we knew he could only be crazy. But today it seems normal, it's even seen in children's games. Will we be able to reeducate these children?

I am worried too about the economic future of a country that has been pillaged: our minerals are looted, our forests are looted, our banks are looted, even people are looted. I am afraid of a future of political chaos.