

## 50 years 50 faces: sexual violence in DRC

From 1996 to 2003, conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) claimed 3.8 million lives; by 2008 disease and starvation had taken the death toll to 5.4 million. Sexual violence against girls and women has been one of the most horrific aspects of the conflict, with the eastern province of Sud-Kivu being particularly affected. Even now local groups say an average of 40 women are raped every day in the area.

It is estimated that since 1996 more than 200,000 rapes have occurred in DRC, but with extreme stigmatisation of women who have suffered sexual violence, the true figure is likely to be closer to 400,000. CAFOD works across Sud-Kivu on anti-stigmatisation programmes within communities, and medical referral and psychosocial care for those affected by sexual violence. At present, CAFOD funds eight Listening Rooms in Sud-Kivu, where women can receive counselling and spend time together learning a trade, such as embroidery. CAFOD has helped more than 12,000 women get back on their feet physically and mentally through the Listening Rooms.

### Exhibition & short film

During a recent trip to the Kivus, CAFOD's Pascale Palmer undertook a photo project of the women and girls attending CAFOD's Listening Rooms to run as an exhibition in conjunction with the anniversary of DRC's 50 years of independence from June 30.

The photos show 50 faces for the 50 years of independence – 40 are individual headshots, framed and lit in the same way to highlight the uniformity and scale of the crisis of sexual violence. But the close-up portraits clearly show that each woman and girl is an individual, looking at the camera with different feelings, different life experiences, hopes and expectations. The positioning of each individual against a plain background and to the side of the frame indicates the idea that these women and their suffering are at the margins of society in DRC. It also hints at the fact that they are still in the process of healing, not yet ready to take the central position they once did.

The short exhibition trailer is made by motion graphics animator Adriano Gazza ([agazza@mac.com](mailto:agazza@mac.com)). It reflects the same themes of scale and humanity of the photographic exhibition.

The **50 years 50 faces: sexual violence in DRC** exhibition and film have been created to coincide with 50 years of independence for DRC - a hugely important milestone for the nation. At the heart of the exhibition is the recognition of the need, not just to mark this anniversary, but to use the opportunity to highlight the ongoing issue of sexual violence and its impact on the women of DRC.

The exhibition is launched on July 21, 2010 with a private view at CAFOD's Waterloo HQ. The exhibition will be open to the public at the [Morley Gallery](#) before touring for 12 months.

**For more information please keep checking this page or email [ppalmer@cafod.org.uk](mailto:ppalmer@cafod.org.uk)**