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For immediate release

Photo exhibition '50 years 50 faces: sexual violence in DRC' moves to the Morley Gallery in South London

Following the successful launch of aid agency CAFOD's exhibition highlighting the issue of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the photographs go on public display at the renowned Morley Gallery.

From Monday August 2, for three weeks, the images and words of 50 women affected by sexual violence from the Eastern region of DRC will be open to the public before touring the UK for 12 months.

The BBC's award-winning foreign affairs correspondent Mike Thomson who spoke at last week's exhibition launch said: "These pictures are amazing and each one shows the courage of the women in Congo. These women must be applauded for standing up and being counted."

Human rights campaigner Lord Alton of Liverpool also added his support to the exhibition. He said: "The pain and suffering that is evident in the images on that wall tell their own story and it's often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. This exhibition is an extraordinary achievement."

Notes to editors

- The exhibition is at the Morley Gallery, 61 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7HT, from August 2-19, 2010 before touring for 12 months. For more information go to www.morleycollege.ac.uk or email ppalmer@cafod.org.uk
- Images from the exhibition are available for use on- and off-line. Please contact Pascale Palmer ppalmer@cafod.org.uk 07785 950 585

Background

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

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 to coincide with the anniversary of DRC's 50 years of independence.

The photos show 50 faces for the 50 years of independence – 40 are individual head-shots, 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 ***50 years 50 faces: sexual violence in DRC*** exhibition has 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.

To give to CAFOD's DRC appeal please go to cafod.org.uk