



**Civilian Peace Service Canada (CPSC) Conference:
"Women Building Peace"
February 15 to 17, 2009, Saint Paul's University, 223
Main Street, Ottawa**



This conference followed from the very successful dinner hosted by the Canadian Department of Peace Initiative (CDPI) held in September, honoring the contribution of women to peace. The conference is developed in cooperation with the CDPI, Saint Paul University, the Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution (CICR), the Rideau Institute, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, and One World Inc. Organizers acknowledge, with appreciation, the PSAC Social Justice Fund, Parliament Hill Local 70390, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, One World Inc., MDR Associates Conflict Resolution Inc. for the contributions made to the success of the conference.

**Violeta Manoukian ©
February 17, 2009**

Biography:

For over two decades Violeta Manoukian has been involved with upper level international headquarters policy design and administration, as well as on-site implementation of human and economic resource development. As a specialist in participatory approaches to development and poverty reduction she has worked with several United Nations organizations (UNDP, UNICEF, UNCDF, UNFPA), as well as with the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank. She has collaborated in bilateral efforts of the Canadian International Development Agency and the U.K. Department for International Development. Over the course of her career, Ms. Manoukian has been professionally involved in participatory development efforts in 20 countries, several of which were at the time actively involved in conflict or in post-conflict transitional phases: Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Nepal, Haiti, Rwanda, and most recently, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

From 2004 to 2006 she was Advisor to the Congolese Ministry of Plan in charge of preparing the Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy Paper (PRGSP), presented to and approved by the World Bank in 2006. During that time she provided guidance for launching a Participatory Poverty Appraisal (PPA) involving the participation of over 37,000 Congolese men, women, and youth. In collaboration with Congolese colleagues, she designed the PPA methodology, prepared the training-of-trainers manual for NGOs to be deployed in the field, conducted quality control of field teams, and helped to analyze results and synthesize them into a final national PPA report. Ms. Manoukian recently finalized a case study for UNICEF/DRC entitled "Realities of Women and Children in

D.R. Congo” based on the PPA data. A summary of the study is being presented at this conference.

Violeta Manoukian is Director of IN-PACT Group (International Participatory Alternatives through Co-operation, Training, and Trade), a consulting firm based in Ottawa. She may be contacted at: vmanoukian@in-pactgroup.on.ca.

Presentation:

The Realities of Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

I. Introduction and context

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the third largest country in Africa, is vast and endowed with an abundance of natural resources. Yet its estimated population of 62 million people is among the poorest in the world. With a Gross National Product per capita estimated at US\$120, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) places it as the 181st country in the world. Over 75% of the population is believed to live on less than US\$1 a day. According to the U.N. Human Development Index (HDI), it ranks among the ten countries in the world with the lowest HDI = 0.411.

The historical background behind these figures are three decades of bad governance plagued by corruption, followed in the 90s by the deadliest conflict since World War II. It destabilized most of Central Africa, involving 14 armed groups, innumerable militias, and three rebel Congolese movements. The country’s already weak economic and social structures collapsed during the conflict. In 2001 the U.N. deployed international peace keeping forces, its largest and most expensive contingent worldwide, which still remain in the country. Peace agreements were signed in 1999 and 2003. They led to an interim coalition government, followed by national elections held for the first time in 2006. The country has embarked on a new phase but rebel local disputes over land and power continue to fester in the five eastern provinces and threaten the stability not only of DRC but also of the entire Great Lakes region.

During the course of 2004 and 2005 the interim government launched an extensive Participatory Poverty Appraisal (PPA). The PPA was used as a basis for preparing the country’s Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy Paper (PRGSP), presented to and approved by the World Bank in 2006.

The PPA process was carried out by ten non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in all eleven provinces of the country, covering 94 of its 145 districts, and 470 local sites. It involved the participation of 35,750 people. Civil society (including common citizens, faith-based organizations, labor unions, NGOs, women groups, youth associations, and

community representatives), the private sector, national and local public institutions, and political representatives participated in this exercise.

Violeta Manoukian, the presenter at this conference, was Advisor to the Congolese Ministry of Plan in charge of preparing the PRGSP. In collaboration with Congolese colleagues, she designed the PPA methodology, prepared the training-of-trainers manual for NGOs to be deployed in the field, conducted quality control of field teams, and helped to analyze results and synthesize them into a final national PPA report. Ms. Manoukian recently finalized a case study for UNICEF/DRC entitled “Realities of Women and Children in D.R. Congo” based on the PPA data. A summary of the study is being presented at this conference.

II. PPA Findings: The Realities of Congolese Women

The sobriquet “She of a thousand arms” is commonly applied to Congolese women. Truthfully, they deserve the honor, but unfortunately for them, their resourceful, marvelous arms often bring about premature ageing and death. The profile of females in DRC that emerges from PPA reports is a life of penury, hard work, and sacrifice. Deprived of even the most basic human rights, subjected to violence and oppressed by retrograde practices, Congolese women are to be credited as givers of life and providers for the needs of their families. They accomplish these feats with minimal support from the males closest to them or from social institutions.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for DRC has voiced serious concerns about this situation:

“The Committee is concerned that in the post-war transition period, the promotion of women’s human rights and gender equality is not seen as a priority, in particular in efforts to address the consequences of armed conflict and in the peace-building and reconstruction processes. It is also concerned about the small number of women in leadership positions.

While recognizing the efforts undertaken by the State party aimed at the reconstruction of the country and its socio-economic fabric after the long years of armed conflict, including the repatriation, rehabilitation and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, the majority of whom are women, the Committee is concerned that the widespread poverty among women and the poor socio-economic conditions are among the causes of the violations of women’s human rights and discrimination against them.”¹

DRC has experienced negative growth almost constantly since the mid 1970s. Since then, household consumption has declined steadily due to economic mismanagement (1975-1990), political instability (1990-96) and wars (1996-2003). In 2001, real GDP per capita represented only the fifth of what it was in 1974, while real household consumption per

¹ CEDAW, 2006.

capita was about one fourth of its 1974 value. Positive economic growth was recorded in 2002-03 for the first time after more than two decades of negative growth.²

Marital conflict and dysfunctional families are among the intangible, yet nonetheless dire, consequences of poverty in DRC. PPA participants throughout the country recount how the very foundation of society, the Congolese family, is in crisis. Several factors contribute to this critical condition. The most frequently mentioned is the country's economic downturn resulting in an astonishing high level of unemployment, mostly among males. This has forced wives and mothers to become the main providers of their families' livelihoods; they are mostly engaged in farming and the informal sector. As a result, males have lost their former social status within their own household. This in turn has fostered negative feelings of resentment, jealousy, etc. A great number of PPA sites also report idle males given to alcoholism and/or gambling. They describe as well the increasing incidence of marital conflict and violence against women. Polygamy is a frequent topic of discussion in PPA reports. In some cases it is associated with poverty, while in the majority of cases it is perceived as indicative of wealth. It is now clear that poverty is generalized and does not spare any social group, but due to remarkable gender inequalities, women are more affected than men.

PPA participants throughout the eleven provinces of DRC denounce recalcitrant traditional and religious beliefs and practices that coupled with widespread lack of awareness are depriving females from exercising the rights accorded to them by the Congolese Constitution and Family Code, and the UN Declaration of Human Rights:

- Congolese females of all ages have the socio-economic status of second-class persons – women are perceived as less worthy than men in legal, economic, social, and political terms
- From a very early age females are socialized to believe their aim in life is to serve and obey males and bear them children
- There is widespread increase in teen pregnancies and teen prostitution due to immature marriage and maternity
- The vast majority of families favors the education of boys over girls, depriving females of the right to literacy and education and, consequently, to a better life
- Deprived of education and opportunities to develop their personal and collective leadership potential, females must abide by the dictates of male decision-makers in both private and public spheres of life
- For the majority of Congolese families, the household economy is agriculturally based. Work in agricultural fields is divided along gender lines. Men are responsible for cutting trees, clearing, preparing the ground and slash-and-burn – for any specific field these initial tasks usually do not recur. In contrast, women are in charge of seeding, hoeing and harvesting – all constantly recurring tasks. Women also fish, raise poultry, do crafts, and manufacture alcohol, charcoal, soap, etc.

² The World Bank, Poverty Diagnostic, 2005.

- The worsening condition of roads and access to markets, higher levels of erosion and/or pollution are aggravating the workload of women who must walk long distances to work in fields, to reach markets to sell or buy products, to gather and carry firewood, and to provide water for the entire family
- In many communities females are reified as objects to be acquired by dowry and/or as cheap rural labor, also referred to as “machines”
- As a consequence, males regard polygamy as a source of wealth; in contrast, most focus groups of women who addressed this subject would like it abolished
- Women are overworked and deprived of leisure time as amply evidenced in numerous PPA daily and seasonal calendars; this results in poor health and premature ageing and death
- In the majority of cases, married women must obtain their spouses’ consent to have a job³, travel, or seek credit
- Wives are poor because, in spite of doing most of the work, their husbands have total control over resources
- The poverty of males is compensated for by the psychological power they wield over females and their economic power over female productivity
- Females are deprived of their reproductive rights, having little or no access to family planning and safe sex methods, they simply must abide by their spouses’ wishes and end up having too many pregnancies too close to each other
- The majority of Congolese women has no access to social services, including to pre and post natal care, as these are non-existent and/or unaffordable
- Married females are denied the right to inherit by their natal family. Upon the death of the husband, his family takes over all his previous possessions. Therefore widows and their children are among the most destitute
- Widowhood, celibacy, sterility, and divorce marginalize women and plunge women into unceasing uncertainty
- With the exception of matriarchal communities, very few Congolese women own land, a fundamental source of wealth. Even in matriarchal societies, males exercise control over economic activities.
- Females are deprived of the right to speak their minds in male dominated gatherings such as family circles, community councils, palavers, etc.
- In the majority of households as well as communities, males have control over important decision-making and resources, stripping females of their rights and possessions and subjugating them into life-long dependence
- Large numbers of Congolese women suffer from low self-esteem and inferiority complex
- A great number of females are victims of constant sexual harassment and/or violence whether at school, at home, at the work place, or at the community. These victims seldom are offered professional help or are able seek justice for fear of the consequences and/or dearth of services
- Females of all ages are more vulnerable than males to sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS due to rape and adulterous husbands who are against the use of condoms.

³ In accordance with Article 3 of DRC’s Work Code [*Code du travail*]

Congolese females suffer the severe triple consequences of violence and sexual abuse: physical, emotional, and economic. Whether made public or hidden within families, whether perpetrators are men in uniform or relatives of the victim, violence and abuse leave deep, indelible scars. Even more so, when perpetrated with total impunity, as is more often than not the case in DRC.

The International Rescue Committee estimates that 5.4 million people have died in DRC since 1998. In fact, 45,000 people continue to die every month – most deaths are from malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia, malnutrition and other preventable diseases. It places the current national mortality rate at approximately 60 percent higher than the Sub-Saharan average. Poor living conditions are severely aggravated by war. The endemic conflict in DRC has been called ‘the forgotten war’, a war that officially ended in 2006. Yet rape remains a constant reality. From 1996 to the present, war has been waged against women by armed groups who violate, mutilate, torture, and infect women with HIV/AIDS as a systemic weapon of war. The impact of this attack affects not only the victims but also their families and their communities, and thus strikes at the very core of the social and economic fabric of Congolese society. It is a blatant crime against humanity.

III. Relevance of the Civilian Peace Service of Canada to Conflict in DRC

- In the case of DRC, armed conflict and war are aggregate terms that veil gender differentials such as sexual violence, rape, HIV/AIDS, forced female labor, constant fear and insecurity, and so on. In other words, they veil the truth that there is a war against women, a war with significant personal and social consequences long after the official cease of hostilities.
- CPSC to embrace a multidimensional understanding of conflict that encompasses not only armed conflict but also ethnic rivalries, social exclusion, and family violence. Thus CPSC efforts need to be grounded in social, economic, and cultural knowledge of local beliefs, values, and conditions.
- Lasting peace and development are intricately related to respect of human rights and empowerment – social, economic, and political. CPSC efforts not to lose sight of these long-term goals by promoting initiatives to foster a paradigm change that empowers Congolese women to decide and exercise increased control over their private and public lives.
- To function effectively as an external change agent CPSC must involve the participation of representatives of all stakeholder groups, making sure to include those usually excluded. In order to efficiently accomplish this, CPSC members will need to safeguard inclusion by use of participatory skills/techniques such as:
 - Stakeholder Analysis (disaggregating stakeholder groups where applicable by gender, age, and socio-economic status)

- Participatory Gender Analysis
 - Participatory Needs Assessment
 - Participatory Strategic Planning
 - Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation (not only of U.N. Resolution 1325 but of all initiatives being undertaken).
- Myriad peace building approaches are now being used; CPSC offers value added:
 - offers a sustained nonviolent response to conflict and warfare
 - institutes a centralized repository of lessons learned (increasing the potential for dissemination and scaling up)
 - creates the nurturing conditions for socio-economic innovation from below with support from above.