

Statement by the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice on the Arrest of Germain Katanga

On 18 October 2007, the International Criminal Court (ICC) took into custody Germain Katanga, former senior commander of the *Force de Résistance Patriotique en Ituri* (FRPI) militia, active in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Katanga is charged with 9 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity including sexual slavery. The full set of charges are: murder, inhumane acts, and sexual slavery as crimes against humanity; willful killing, using child soldiers, attacks on civilian population, inhuman treatment, sexual slavery, and pillaging as war crimes.

The Women's Initiatives has been directly involved in the DRC situation since March 2006 when the ICC failed to charge Thomas Lubanga Dyilo with gender based crimes. Mr Lubanga, the Founder and President of the UPC militia, was the first suspect taken into custody by the ICC. The lack of charges for sexual violence against Lubanga was seen by many local DRC NGOs and ourselves to be a significant omission given the availability of information, witnesses and documentation from multiple sources including the United Nations and various human rights organizations showing the widespread commission of rape and other forms of sexualized violence by the UPC militia group.

The Women's Initiatives has advocated for the ICC to investigate gender based crimes committed by a range of militia groups and armed forces in eastern DRC. Our advocacy, legal filings and documentation of crimes committed in relation to the Lubanga case put the spotlight on the absence of charges for violence committed against women by the UPC.

For the second DRC investigation the ICC appears to have taken a more strategic and focused approach and as such found evidence of gender based crimes committed by the FRPI militia.

We are pleased to see charges for sexual slavery as both a war crime and crime against humanity have been included in the indictments against Katanga and call for an expansion of these charges over the coming months.

Much work remains to be done in both DRC cases and more broadly for accountability for grave crimes, including gender based crimes, committed by militia groups, armed forces and security personnel in eastern DRC. The work of the ICC towards ending impunity for these crimes is a significant contribution towards addressing violence against women in the DRC and in armed conflicts elsewhere.

We are pleased, with this arrest and charges in other cases, that the ICC is beginning to address its obligations under the Rome Statute to prosecute gender based crimes. Such prosecutions are essential towards ultimately preventing sexualized violence against women in armed conflict.