

# WOMEN'S INITIATIVES FOR GENDER JUSTICE

Press Release  
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## Investigation of Rape and Sexual Violence in CAR

The Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice welcomes the decision by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to formally open an investigation into crimes committed in the Central African Republic (CAR) during 2002 and 2003, said Executive Director Brigid Inder.

"In May 2006 we held consultations in CAR with women's organizations, victims/survivors groups and women lawyers who were adamant the ICC should open an investigation and prosecute those responsible for rape and other forms of sexual violence" she said.

"Today's announcement on CAR is significant because it is the first time the Prosecutor has announced the intention to explicitly investigate gender based crimes as a priority at the outset of a formal investigation" said Brigid Inder.

The widespread commission of rape and sexual violence in CAR is a feature common to each of the conflict situations where the Court is conducting or has conducted its investigations. "What is unusual about the CAR situation is the quantity of material available documenting these crimes. Local women's organizations and victims/survivor groups have documented more than 1000 incidents of rape. This has made it hard to ignore these crimes and provides the Court with a strong resource of information and potential evidence to consider during their investigations" Brigid Inder said.

"Given the evidence and information already gathered by local NGOs and the willingness of victims/survivors and witnesses to report the crimes, we expect full and comprehensive charging for gender based crimes this time by the ICC" said Inder.

"We call on the Court to establish an information and outreach presence and office in the CAR as quickly as possible and to hold specific meetings and consultations with women and women's groups. Despite the court operating in 3 conflict situations over the past 4 years, there has not yet been a single consultation with women in any of the conflict situations. It's time for the Court to address this and given the intention to investigate allegations of rape, what better place to hold their first workshop with women than in CAR" Brigid Inder said.

"We support the Prosecutor's intention to also monitor the current hostilities in the northern parts of the country where women's organisations have said human rights violations continue to be committed especially by the Presidential Guard and the Army" the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice said.

The legal rights of women in CAR are very limited - marital rape is not illegal, the law does not afford women the right to inherit, there are very few convictions for rape and women do not have confidence in the police nor the judicial system regarding gender based crimes, domestic violence is considered acceptable and female genital mutilation is still widely practiced especially in northern CAR.

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“Women victims/survivors of rape during the coup period of 2002-2003 have been rejected by their husbands, partners and families, many have contracted sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS as a result of rape, violence-related trauma is very high and women who had children as a result of rape during the coup period have been ostracized by the community” the Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice said.

“Given there are few convictions for rape in CAR, despite it being common, an eventual decision by the court to prosecute sexual violence, will demonstrate these crimes are serious and will assist in the prosecution of non-conflict related rape and other forms of sexual violence by the national judiciary”.

“Prosecution of rape and other forms of sexual violence will demonstrate that the ICC recognises the human and legal rights of women in CAR even where these are denied by the laws and practices of the country” said Brigid Inder.

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