



COMMUNIQUE FROM THE PARTICIPANTS OF  
A ROUNDTABLE MEETING ON  
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE  
CALLING THE LEADERS OF THE GREAT LAKES FOR ACTION ON  
THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM VIOLENCE

KAMPALA, UGANDA  
8 DECEMBER 2017

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**We**, hereby the concerned participants, a cross section from the society of the Great Lakes Region including representatives from the Police, the Military, Prisons, Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations from Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and DRC, Refugees and the Media attending the Roundtable Dialogue on the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence in the Great Lakes Region held organized by CARE East, Central and Southern Africa Regional Office at Imperial Royale Hotel, Kampala, Uganda on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2017, under the theme: ***Leave No One Behind: Together for Cross-Border and Journeys to Settlements Free from Violence.***

**Having** taken note of the evidence gathered about the continued use of Gender Based Violence in the armed conflicts in this region, having listened to the horrifying testimonies of refugee women and girls from South Sudan, DRC and Burundi on the violence they have suffered in their countries of origin and during their flight to Uganda, we herewith urge the leaders of the Great Lakes Region to bring an end to the conflicts that are tearing the region apart and continue to destroy millions of lives and to ensure the protection of all civilians, and of women and girls in particular, including when fleeing conflict to seek refuge in neighboring countries.

Recent research from various organizations, including CARE International, has demonstrated that GBV, including sexual violence, rape and defilement, continues to be used as a weapon of war to inflict destruction, humiliate and kill. In DRC and South Sudan, women and girls are abducted to be used as sex and reproductive slaves, tortured during individual and gang rapes, forced to marry their perpetrators, and many other atrocities. Women and girls fleeing the conflict are also victims of violence. Those who are lucky to survive suffer from severe forms of trauma, including depression, and many contemplate suicide. The leaders of their countries of origin are failing to protect them and humanitarian organizations are faced with access challenges. In South Sudan, many parts of the country have become too dangerous for aid workers to access and provide critical life-saving interventions. In DRC the humanitarian situation has deteriorated dramatically over the past year – including in regions like Kasai that were previously considered stable. Rape and sexual violence have been used as weapons of war by all armed parties of the conflict. In July 2017, 114 protection violations, including sexual violence, were reported with more than half of all women and girls survivors being adolescents.

Perpetrators are not only from armed groups, but also from members of survivors' own communities. The majority of perpetrators are never brought to justice.

Despite having a very progressive refugee policy in Uganda, the humanitarian response is underfunded; leaving critical gaps in protection, GBV prevention, care and support in refugee settlements and most critically along the various centers that women and girls go through between borders to settlements. In all the countries in the Great Lakes Region, there is lack of clear interventions and mechanisms that protect women and girls from GBV, especially sexual violence faced during their flight to countries of refuge.

Participants at the Round Table meeting therefore urge the Presidents of the Great Lakes countries to stop the violence against their citizens, in particular against women and girls, and to work together to achieve lasting peace and security for all. All governments where the deadliest conflicts are currently happening —South Sudan, DRC, Burundi and their neighbors— are part of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and are signatories to international, regional and domestic protocols, laws and policies on Women, Peace and Security and on eradication of sexual violence and protection and access to services for GBV survivors. Yet, more girls are being abducted as sex slaves and more women are forced to watch their daughters and sisters being raped every day.

**It is time for Presidents and Governments to act and demonstrate their commitment to effectively implement the Protocols they have ratified. We therefore demand:**

**To the Heads of States and Governments of ICGLR Member States;**

1. Address the root causes of armed conflicts in the region, with priority to the conflicts in South Sudan, DRC and Burundi that lead to population displacements, massive human rights violations and economic collapse.
2. Enforce all protocols on Women, Peace and Security and on eradication of GBV and sexual violence in general. In relation to armed conflicts in particular, prioritise enforcement of UNSCR 1325, 1820, the Goma Declaration and the Kampala Declaration on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. This includes allocating sufficient resources to enable for the adequate implementation and domestication of the various protocols through National Action Plans.
3. Prioritize immediate deployment of additional and well-trained Government Security Forces, including more female police and military, to protect civilians in countries of origin as well as during their flight to countries of refuge.
4. Ensure full and safe access to humanitarian organizations to all locations with populations in urgent need of life saving assistance.
5. Ensure perpetrators of sexual violence are arrested, prosecuted and punished through the establishment of special regional and in-country courts / special sessions for GBV and for sexual violence.
6. Commit resources towards the participation of displaced and refugee populations in peace discussions and negotiations, including the participation of women and girls
7. Establish, resource and operationalise Regional GBV Sub-Cluster Mechanisms and Teams working on cross-border GBV issues.