

A hundred stories, one horrific reality

**ANGOLA: SYSTEMATIC RAPES AND VIOLENCE AGAINST
EXPELLED CONGOLESE MIGRANTS**



Photo © Cédric Gerbehaye/MSF

THE WOMEN TESTIFY

December 2007





Ten women tell of their Angolan ordeal

Every year, tens of thousands of Congolese cross the border to work in the diamond-rich province of Lunda Norte, in Angola.

Since 2003, the Angolan army regularly expels some of this “illegal” population to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This year, it is estimated that 44,000 people have already been deported to DRC.

Already denounced by MSF in 2004, these violent expulsions feature pervasive and systematic sexual violence against Congolese women perpetrated by some soldiers in the Angolan army.

Since October 2007, MSF teams present in Western Kasai— a Congolese province bordering Angola —have collected one hundred testimonies among expelled Congolese women. These women report abuse, detention, rapes and beatings by the Angolan military before being expelled to the other side of the border.

Here are ten of their stories.

MSF: Medical and psychological support

In October 2007, alerted about the situation of the Congolese populations expelled from Angola, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) teams in the DRC went to Western Kasai province to assess the needs.

In response to the overwhelmingly high number of women who had survived sexual violence, MSF set up a health centre in Kamako, close to the Angolan border. Often initially consulting for lower abdominal pain or lower back pain, these women receive much-needed medical care as well as psychological support to help them cope with physical and psychological trauma resulting from the violence they have experienced.

At the same time, an MSF mobile medical team regularly travels along the border in order to identify people in need of medical assistance. In Kamako, MSF provides about 100 primary health care consultations a day for women and children, mainly for respiratory infections, dermatosis and malaria.





A Congolese woman raped by the Angolan military, then expelled to Kamako (Western Kasai/DRC) - November 2007 – Photo © Cédric Gerbehaye/MSF



A Congolese woman raped by the Angolan military, then expelled to Kamako (Western Kasai/DRC) - November 2007 – Photo © Cédric Gerbehaye/MSF



Testimony, Kamako

A 30 year-old woman, married with four children. She spent three months in Nzaji, Angola. She was expelled at the end of September 2007.

It was six o'clock in the morning. I was washing myself outside the house. My husband was away. Although I am married to an Angolan, I was not spared during the expulsions. Many soldiers arrived. They told me I had to leave. I did not even have time to get dressed properly. I was taken to Dundo, where I spent two days in a pit which had been converted into a prison.

There were 58 other people in Nzaji who had also been arrested. There were men, women and children. I was alone, as I had not come to Angola with my children. They stayed in Congo during the three months I spent in Angola.

In the prison, we were given nothing to eat or drink. The soldiers took the women out to rape them. I was raped eight times by two soldiers. They took me out of the prison and they raped me. It was dark and I do not know if it was the same soldiers or not. They said they would not beat me if I lay down. I had to let them take me. The soldiers were well dressed; they had a lot of cartridges. If I had not let them do it, they would have killed me. After raping me, they put me back in prison.

Afterwards they brought us by truck to the border. They told us: '*Now you're going home.*' We were 327 persons, divided between two trucks. There was no problem at the border.

Since I came back here to Congo, I do not feel at ease at all. I have pain in my lower abdomen, pain in my back. My body is itching. I've been able to find my children again. They are well. My brother, who was also expelled, has stayed in Kamako. I have told him about the conditions of my detention. He has not told me about his. I feel safe here. I suffered too much there. They treated us like animals. In the future, I need to find a way to live on here.

This woman suffers from abdominal and back pain as well as skin rashes.





Testimony, Kamako

A 28 year-old woman, living with her boyfriend and one of her two children (the other has died). She was expelled in October 2007.

I used to go over to Angola to do business there. I sold groundnuts and smoked fish. I used to stay for one or two months, then return to Congo. The last time I went to Angola, I was ambushed and raped by three soldiers.

I was in Maludi. The soldiers came and burnt down the village. We fled, running in every direction. It was at that moment that I ran into three soldiers, who took me by force and raped me, one after the other. It was a terrible shock. One held me by the arms while the others raped me.

Then I ran into the bush. I came across some other people from Maludi. There were many of us and we were exhausted. We did not talk to each other. Some stayed behind to rest. I was carrying my little eight year-old boy. There were many other mothers with their children. We did not have anything to eat or drink and we had to walk for two weeks. The three of us arrived at the border, at Kapungu. That is where my son died. He is buried there. I carried on walking until I reached Kamako, where I have a house. I did not receive any aid. When I reached the border, there were crowds of people rushing for it. I was very tired and I did not get anything.

Since then, I have pain in my abdomen and in my back. I do not feel well since it happened. I suffer dizziness and headaches. I go for days without eating.

This woman suffers from abdominal pains and generalized body pain.





Testimony, Luiza

A 44 year-old woman living alone with her five children. She was expelled both in 2004 and in April 2007.

I lived at the "Ferme". I was expelled in 2004. I returned in 2006 and I was expelled again in April 2007. At one o'clock in the morning, soldiers came into the house. They ordered us to leave everything behind and walk to the military camp. I was beaten up at the house. They insulted me: '*Whore, thief, leave everything, do not take anything.*' At the military camp we were imprisoned for three days-- that's how long it takes for the bowels to empty – to find diamond particles. We were not given anything to eat or drink and we defecated in the room.

Some people were killed trying to escape arrest. They fell into the mines. Others were hit by stray bullets.

I was raped in the anus and in the vagina six times in a row by the soldiers. They insulted me.

We left the "Farm" to go to Maludi. It was a three days' walk. For these three days, I was raped by a soldier, who after he had raped me told me he would protect me. All the women there were raped. I think about 250 women. Between Maludi and Nzaji there were no incidents. We walked for two days. At Nzaji, I was put in prison for two days. I was raped twice by two soldiers. I was subjected to vaginal and anal searches for diamonds.

We went by truck from Nzaji to Fukaoma. I had to give up my clothes to be allowed to travel. It was a one hour drive. Then at Fukaoma on the Angolan border, I was raped in the anus by a soldier. It made me bleed. They took all my belongings.

At the Congolese border, there were no problems. We were well received. I made the whole journey with one of my three children. The others were in Congo. I feel safe.

My name was on the registration lists but I did not receive any aid. I went to the hospital but I did not have any money. I was advised to go to the health post for returnees but there was no medicine."

This woman suffers from pain in her fallopian tubes.





Testimony, Sambuyia

A 23 year-old woman, married. Her only child has died. She spent one and a half years in Maludi, Angola. She was expelled in July 2007.

A white man bought the mine. He gave us a deadline to leave the mine. Before that date, there was a young half-Congolese, half-Angolan farmer who had found some 100-carat diamonds. The government arrested him selling these diamonds. They asked him what mine the diamonds came from. He stated that they were from the Maludi mine. They ordered the soldiers to burn down the houses and chase away all the Congolese people. The soldiers ordered us to leave without our belongings and then they threw them away in the river. The soldiers rounded us up. There were more than 1,000 people-- men, women and children. The soldiers started to beat us up. From Maludi, we were led by military escort to Nzaji. We walked for three days. On the way, a soldier ordered me to lie on the ground in front of everybody and he raped me. Every day, I was raped by a soldier before passing the checkpoints. They said : 'You are poor people, thieves, your president has nothing.' After being raped, I was hit with sticks and ropes. I can attest that all the women were subjected to the same treatment as I was during the three days' walk.

We arrived in Nzaji at 7pm. They put us in the prison. There was very little space. Some people were standing; others found enough space to sit down. They did not give us anything to eat or drink and we had to defecate where we stood or sat. While we were imprisoned, there were no rapes. One man and two women died due to the lack of oxygen. We spent the night in the prison. We left the next day at 1 pm. Several groups of returnees were brought together during the journey. They put us in trucks. It took three hours to reach the Angolan border. They did not do anything to us because at Kabuakala, on the other side, the Congolese soldiers were waiting for us.

When we arrived in Kabuakala, the Congolese soldiers gave us food. I did not receive any aid, even though my name was on the registration lists. On the day it was distributed, it was given to the local population. I had a medical examination and went to Kapanga, Katanga for an operation. I had an extra uterine pregnancy and a cyst.

I never want to go back to Angola, even if there is suffering here.





Testimony, Sambuyia

A 20 year-old woman, with one child. She was first expelled in 2003. She was again expelled from Maludi, Angola in July 2007.

The soldiers came and burned down the houses. The soldiers caught me and beat me up. I was mainly hit in the lower abdomen. They called me '*poor Congolese whore.*' They escorted us to Nzaji, four days' walk.

On the first day, I was raped in the anus and in the vagina by three soldiers, one after the other. On the third day, I was raped during the journey by four policemen in front of everybody. All the women suffered the same treatment. There were 70 women.

On the fourth day, I was grabbed by four soldiers. As I spoke their dialect, two soldiers refused to touch me and went away. The other two took me to the toilets to rape me. They kicked me with their boots on my back and sides. I arrived at Nzaji. I spent two hours in the prison.

They put us in a truck, an overloaded 10-wheeler, to go to Fukaoma, a three-hour drive. From Fukaoma to Kabuakala, we walked for three hours. There were no incidents. At the Angolan border, they separated the men from the women. They performed anal and vaginal searches, one after the other without protection. We were 70 women.

Afterwards, I turned to self-medication because I did not have enough money to pay for a medical consultation.

I feel safe and at home here. I want to settle here, but if my husband calls me to confirm that the situation is calm, I will return to Angola.





A Congolese woman raped by the Angolan military, then expelled to Kamako (Western Kasai/DRC) - November 2007 – Photo © Cédric Gerbehaye/MSF



Testimony, Sambuyia

A 34 year-old woman, alone with three children. She spent two months in Maludi, Angola. She was expelled in May 2007.

At four o'clock in the morning, a group of six soldiers entered the house. I was at home with a friend. The six soldiers started to insult and beat us : *'Get out of Angola. You've taken everything here, go and starve in Congo.'* They hit us with their rifle butts all over our bodies. They ordered me to lie down and the six soldiers raped me, one after the other. They did the same to my friend. My friend and I left to join a group of people being expelled. We walked for four days to get to Kassa Mai.

We passed four military posts. At the first two posts, there were no incidents. At the third post, we were raped. All fifteen of us by two soldiers. *'We're raping you so that you do not come back. Pass the message on.'* I think rape is their weapon to prevent people from coming back. We were held up for four hours. At the fourth post, there were no problems. At the two borders, there were no problems. We arrived in Congo at Kassa Mai. I was given plastic sheeting when I arrived. I was examined for gynaecological problems at the hospital in Masuila. I had to pay 2,500 Congolese Francs. I was given an injection.

I never want to go back to Angola, there is too much suffering there.

This woman is suffering from pain in her fallopian tubes.





Testimony, Sambuyia

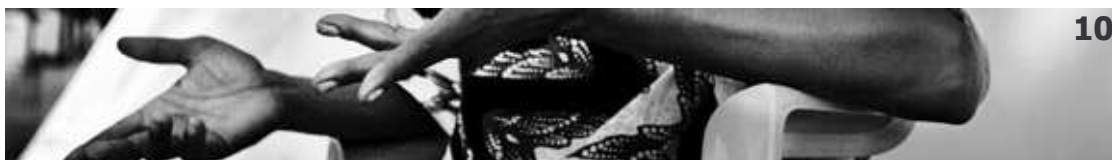
A 31 year-old woman, married with four children. She spent four years in Maludi, Angola. She was expelled in May 2007.

At 7 pm, the soldiers came with a truck. There was a whole battalion. My husband ran away. Husbands flee because they do not want to see their wives being raped. And in general, they get beaten up even harder in front of their wives. Four soldiers came into my house. They began to beat me with sticks. They ordered me to lie down and then raped me, in the anus and the vagina, one after the other. I was taken to prison with the children. I was in there for four days. We were given nothing to eat or to drink. In the prison, there were eight men, four women and children. We defecated in the room. On the first three days, I was beaten and raped every day by four soldiers, always the same men. The other women were subjected to the same treatment. They threw insults at us: *'Look at their breasts, look at their buttocks. You're going to leave everything here.'*

We walked for 12 days and passed four checkpoints. At the first checkpoint, the whole group was beaten up and then they let us go. At the second checkpoint, we were also beaten up. A soldier forced me into his hut and raped me. The other women were subjected to the same treatment. The same thing happened at the third checkpoint. At the fourth checkpoint, I was raped by two soldiers on the side of the road—and so were the other women.

At the two borders, there were no incidents. I re-entered Congo at Kassa Mai. Shortly after Kassa Mai, my five-year-old child died of exhaustion. His body was thrown into the bush. I did not have any medical examination because I could not pay for one.

I have no news from my husband. I do not know if he is still alive. I do not want to return to Angola because of the suffering.





Testimony, Sambuyia

A 30-year-old woman, married with three children. She spent five years in Mbuji, Angola. She was expelled in July 2007.

It was at midnight on a Tuesday that we heard rifle shots. We waited to see what was going to happen. It was usual to hear shooting. But we realised that it was coming towards us. I fled into the bush with my children and my brother-in-law.

The soldiers caught up with us in their truck. Three soldiers asked me if I wanted to live or die. They ordered me to lie down and they raped me one after the other. They put us in the trucks and took us as far as the checkpoint at Samakuma. They locked us up, men and women separately. The men were outside in an enclosed plot and the women were in the prison. There were more than 50 of us in the prison.

We spent one night there. Some soldiers came into the prison and systematically searched all women in the anus and vagina, using their bare hands. They took all the possessions they found on us. Two soldiers ordered me to lie down and raped me one after the other. The other women were also raped. There were more soldiers in the battalion than women in the prison. In the morning, they let us go. We left with two soldiers from the checkpoint. Samakuma is the second checkpoint; we passed the first checkpoint in the truck without stopping.

We walked for a day until the third checkpoint. The two soldiers from the second checkpoint went away. There were 20 soldiers at the third checkpoint. The men were kept outside under supervision in front of the checkpoint. They had to do various jobs, like cutting wood for the soldiers. The women were put in the prison. One soldier wanted to rape me but I refused. So he tied me up and then he raped me. The soldiers threatened the women, saying that if we resisted they would hit us with their machetes. I was injured by the ropes I was tied up with because I had tried to escape. All the other women were raped.

The next morning, they released only the women. Some of the men were released in the afternoon. Those who remained were forcibly enlisted in the Angolan army. When we arrived at the Angolan border, there were no incidents. At the Congolese border, soldiers and officials started demanding that we give them our possessions. But as we had nothing, they let us go.

I re-entered Congo at Kassa Mai. I did not receive any aid. I did not have a medical consultation because I had no money. I feel very bad when I think back to what happened in Angola. I would not dare go back to Angola.





A Congolese woman raped by the Angolan military, then expelled to Kamako (Western Kasai/DRC) - November 2007 – Photo © Cédric Gerbehaye/MSF



A Congolese woman raped by the Angolan military, then expelled to Kamako (Western Kasai/DRC) - November 2007 – Photo © Cédric Gerbehaye/MSF



Testimony, Sambuyia

A 45 year-old woman, married with five children. She spent two years in Mbuji, Angola. She was expelled in May 2007.

It was night, the soldiers knocked on the door. There were ten soldiers. My husband appeared. They started to beat him. They started to beat me too, with clubs and sticks. They separated the men from the women. The men were forced into one truck and the women in another one with the children.

I was transported to a first checkpoint, and put in prison. There were four other women there with their children. We were there for four days. On the first day, we were beaten with sticks and clubs. I was raped by two soldiers in the anus and in the vagina. On the second and third day, I was again raped by two soldiers. On the fourth day, I was raped by five soldiers. I never resisted because I was afraid they would do me even more harm. The other women were also raped every day, several times a day. On the fourth day, we left on foot with three soldiers for the second checkpoint.

On the way, they beat us and two soldiers raped me at the side of the road. At the second checkpoint, the three soldiers went away. We spent one night in prison, where I was raped by three soldiers. The next morning, we were released together with other Congolese men who were to be expelled. We were no longer under military convoy.

We walked for another day to the third checkpoint. We spent the night there in the prison and I was raped by a soldier, as were the three other women. In the morning, we were released. We walked for two days to get to the border.

There were no incidents at the two borders. I re-entered Congo at Maenya Mbulu. I had a medical examination when I got back. I went to the health centre. I paid 2,800 Congolese Francs. I did not receive any other aid.

I remember the things that happened in Angola. Even if they gave me a cow, I would not go back to Angola. It's better to die here.





Testimony, Kamako.

A 40 year-old woman, married with three children. She was expelled in November 2007.

We were at home-- my husband, me and the children. Around mid-day, I heard shooting. I sent my children away. My husband also fled. Seven soldiers arrived. They shot into the air to frighten us and they aimed their rifles at my children. They arrested us. We were brought to the border by truck. In the truck, the soldiers played with the youngest of my children, who is eight years old. They threw the child around as if it was a ball. A soldier hit me with a cord, but another one told him to stop because I was there with my children. I saw other women being abused. There were 17 women, 10 men and 10 children in the truck.

During the journey to the border, the truck stopped several times. One of the soldiers, known for dressing in all black, raped several women. Other soldiers also raped women. They made the truck stop and took the women into the forest to rape them. Afterwards, the truck set off again. The journey went on like that for two days. They did not touch the children. I was not raped because I was with my children. My sister was not raped because she was too ill. That is what the soldiers said. As for my mother, they said she was too old to be raped. We were not given anything to eat or to drink.

At the border, they left us at Kamako. There, I was given two boxes of flour. The people who were in the truck went their separate ways. Some went to Tchikapa, others to Kananga. I do not have other news from the others who were expelled. I was re-united with my husband here.

I would never go back to Angola. I've seen too much suffering there.

