

March 5, 2009

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
United States Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
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1700 Montgomery Street, Suite 240
San Francisco, CA 94111
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Re: Ending Sexual Violence Against Women in the Congo

Dear Senator Boxer:

We are delighted to know that you are chairing the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy and Global Women's Issues. I am a member of Spark. Spark (www.sparksf.org) is a San Francisco-based non-profit network of over 5,000 young professionals who are committed to improving the lives of women around the world. We share your grave concern about global women's rights, specifically as they relate to women in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As you know, rape is rampant in the war-torn Eastern region of the DRC. Indeed, it is a tool of war used to destabilize communities. In 2008, the United Nations formally recognized sexual violence as a war crime, but very little has been done to prevent the violence. Meanwhile these heinous abuses of human rights have already devastated hundreds of thousands of women and girls. We must act now to end this siege against women.

Thus, we respectfully make the following requests:

- 1) Urge President Obama's administration to take a comprehensive approach to addressing the conflict in the DRC.
- 2) Publicly advocate for the immediate deployment of troops for MONUC-the UN peacekeeping force in the Congo. The UN Security Council has already approved 3,000 peacekeeping troops, but they have yet to be deployed. These troops are essential to protect civilians - particularly women and girls at risk for rape - and to bring stability to the region.
- 3) Request of President Obama that he appoints a senior level diplomat dedicated to working on the crisis in the Great Lakes region of Africa, particularly in the eastern DRC. Effective, competent and adequately supported diplomacy is essential to secure lasting peace and protection for women and their communities.
- 4) Hold a subcommittee hearing. Please confer US elected officials on the topic how to respond when violence against women is used as a tool of war. The US needs a comprehensive plan for addressing these atrocities and your subcommittee should lead the effort.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to improving the lives of women around the world.

Sincerely,

