



The importance of Stand Speak Rise Up! support to survivors

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Respect, love and consideration save lives. In 2004 I see darkness, I see the world crumbling around me. I don't need anything because I think it is all over. I refuse to move forward, I refuse to be taken care of, but the pain is intense, neither alcohol nor drugs soothe it; I have no choice. I meet him but I don't believe in him, even after several testimonies. "How can a man repair what other men have so cruelly destroyed?" I had forgotten in my pain and dismay that there were still humans on this earth who still retain their dignity and sacrifice themselves for others.

When I met "The Dr Denis Mukwege" for the first time, he is always calm and compassionate. I am reborn. I leave without saying anything to him, not even a thank you out of shame. I am angry at myself for thinking that he would be like those others. That love, that respect he showed me saved my life and now helps me to save the lives of others in return. Since knowing the Doctor I have faith in life.

In 2017, I am committed to carrying the flame, not because I personally have this strength but because I have received encouragement from many people. I started the fight openly, because for all these years I had been fighting alongside my survivor sisters but in anonymity, with my pain haunting me every second. That year, I join the world network of survivors "SEMA", which comforted me and gives me a little more strength to continue. Together with two other survivors we create the National Movement of Survivors of Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The objectives are set, the line is drawn, we follow in the footsteps of those who started the struggle, but doing this in our own way. We speak, some people listen to us, few understand us, fewer still are committed to this struggle alongside us. Do these people consider us as human, or do they find that there is little out of the ordinary to what happened to us, and that it does not concern them?

In 2018 our struggle is recognised by the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr Mukwege. This is our Nobel Peace Prize. Finally, our voices are heard and our pain is recognised, but what extra consideration does this bring us? Aren't we just extras in forums without really being given a full place and full respect?

In several conferences we criticised the fact that we were only represented to testify our pain, and that many people did not care about our expectations of what we really wanted.

At the beginning of 2019 an invitation to a conference is sent by the Mukwege Foundation to SEMA. I say to myself that this is just one more conference, just one more trip, to Luxembourg. But what will it change for me and for the other survivors, all the victims?

I don't believe. I don't believe in change, but I show up in Luxembourg, with the smile and enthusiasm of my sisters from other countries encouraging me. I say to myself "let's wait and see".

Surprise, surprise! Who do I see that morning but the Grand Duchess, embracing every woman. I had tears in my eyes, I couldn't believe it.

« *The forum
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Can a person of her rank be so sociable and committed? It was the beginning of a great adventure and changed the way I see myself. She said in one of her speeches: "the forum today is not an end in itself, but is a great page turning in the fight against sexual violence". **These were not just words. In this conference "the victim", the survivor, was at the centre of everything in every panel. They were listened to, not as spectators, but as experts.** Children born of rape were given their place. This subject was not much discussed in the past, as we forgot that it was one of the heavy consequences that we all must carry daily.

I was on a panel as an expert in reparations. In the end I understood that it was a right and that it had to be done for us and with us. Today it is a passion of mine, and we are able to see progress in our country, the DRC, as a result of the determination that we were able to draw upon from Stand Speak Rise Up! This forum made many of my sisters dream, and today we are fighting to achieve our dreams. I will testify even decades in the future that "from this forum I got greater strength and determination, and I share with others today". The Stand Speak Rise Up! Forum addressed many survivors' concerns: consideration, respect and inclusion at all levels. It was a great experience for me and for many other survivors. **Respect breeds confidence and strength.** In this Forum I met exceptional people who did their best to make sure that my fight, my dream, was recognised everywhere. People like Hugues Dewavrin

who supported me to the point where my testimony became a book - "Au-delà de nos larmes", published by Antoinette Fouque - which today raises awareness around the world.

A few months after the "Stand Speak Rise Up!" forum, a situation that is difficult for everyone to face, is shaking the world. People are dying by the hundreds every day in many parts of the world, the world's economy is plummeting, hope of resisting this other scourge is minimal. Yet nevertheless, generous people are always thinking about the well-being of others! The day I received a message from Stand Speak Rise Up! that the Forum would be repeated, and the money raised was to help needy survivors in several communities, 40 women in my village started a farming business featuring a large rabbit hutch.

In Chombo/Kavumu in South Kivu, women have contributed to the country's economy with agricultural initiatives. These have supported more than 100 other families, with the solidarity fund Mutuelles des Solidarité helping to harness their efforts for more than 10 years. This project has strengthened women's commitment to development and change. Protective equipment against Covid-19 was distributed to families and to a hospital in Kavumu. Three women were treated medically by their sisters, following a very good cassava and sweet potato harvest. We note that the 2020 project has produced several positive results, with several indirect beneficiaries including mutual aid associations, schools, hospitals, families...

In 2021, we received further financial support to continue the farming activity in Kavumu, and a chicken coop project in Goma.

The eruption of the volcano caused us to lose almost 500 fertilised eggs and several hens. However, there was hope and encouragement from Stand Speak Rise Up! We have started a fish farming project in North Kivu but which still requires more funding. And unfortunately the farming seasons have been really bad. However, we hope that the coming season can be the best yet. Love, respect and consideration have helped hundreds of people to stand up, fight back and become agents of change.

Thanks you to all those who contribute directly to this life-saving work.