



Amnesty International
USA

The Ginetta Sagan Fund

Winter 2010

Supporting courageous women who risk their lives
to defend the human rights of others

"Ginetta Sagan's name is synonymous with
the fight for human rights around the world.
She represents to all the triumph of the
human spirit over tyranny."

-President Bill Clinton-



For more than three decades, the late Ginetta Sagan, recipient of the 1996 Presidential Medal of Freedom, fought for the lives and rights of prisoners of conscience throughout the world. A tireless crusader and eternal optimist, Ginetta's passionate dedication inspired generations of human rights advocates. In honor of her humanitarian achievements, Amnesty International USA created the Ginetta Sagan Fund in 1994, one of AIUSA's first permanently endowed funds and the only fund that specifically addresses the needs of women and children. The Ginetta Sagan Fund ensures the continuation of Ginetta's human rights legacy and brings worldwide attention to the abuses perpetrated on women and children.

Congolese Survivor Turned Activist Honored with the 2010 Ginetta Sagan Award for Women's & Children's Rights



Rebecca Masika
overcame multiple assaults
to help others

Photo courtesy of Tim Freccia/World Vision

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Katsuva, recipient of Amnesty International USA's 2010 Ginetta Sagan Award for Women's and Children's Rights, has endured four sexual assaults and many other threats to herself and her family while sheltering women and child rape survivors in her home, and defending their rights in South Kivu, in eastern

Congo has been consumed by fighting for nearly two decades. Formally, the Second Congo War involving eight African nations and about 25 armed groups, began in 1998 and ended in 2003, when the Transitional Government assumed power in DRC. The violence, considered the bloodiest conflict since World War II, has continued. At least 5.4 million people have died since 1998, according to the International Rescue Committee, with as many as 45,000 new deaths every month. Millions more have been injured, displaced, impoverished and traumatized.

Combatants attack women to terrorize and humiliate communities and establish their dominance. Gang rape is common. In 2004, Amnesty International reported that 40,000 cases of rape had been reported in the previous six years. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that more than 8,000 women were sexually assaulted in 2009 alone. Many women are left for dead. Those who survive often suffer psychological damage, infection with HIV, and permanent physical injury.

The majority of assault victims are under the age of 18. Women who have been assaulted, and children born of assault, are often rejected by their families and communities.

Katsuva has endured four rapes. In 1998, attackers killed Katsuva's husband, and then violated her -- on top of her late husband's remains -- and her daughters, then 9 and 13. Katsuva and her daughters, who became pregnant, were disowned by her late husband's relatives and forced to leave their home.

"We were attacked by soldiers one night and they killed my parents that same night. They took me and my smaller sister to the forest, I was there for three months... I do not know what happened to my smaller sister since we came to the forest.... I was taken as wife by several soldiers.... I fled finally from the forest. When I came home, my family ran away from me too. They refused to receive me. I went to a church and this woman (Rebecca Masika) did awareness-raising there and I explained to her my situation. I felt like taking my own life that day. I did not know what to do. I so miss my parents. I am now living with Masika, and I would have killed myself would I not have met her. She has supported me a lot and I gave birth here."

-- 16-year-old girl whose parents were murdered before she was raped, forced to be a fighter's "wife," and give birth to a baby boy (as told to Human Rights Watch)



In 1999, Katsuva began a *centre d'ecoute* (also known as a *maison d'ecoute* or listening house) in her home. Listening houses have sprung up around eastern Congo to act as shelters for violated women. Katsuva's is unusual in being run by a woman survivor and in its location in an isolated and conflict-ridden area, far from the hospitals and legal protection available in urban areas.

Katsuva says. "We have suffered but now we are strong and we are harvesting food."

In 2002, Katsuva renamed her center the Association des Personnes Desheritees Unies pour le Developpement (APDUD). The association is a safe place for women to recover and seek medical help. Almost 50 houses have been constructed for women to occupy while rebuilding their lives. When possible, Masika reunites assault victims with their families. "Each woman has her own specific problem and when we're together, we discuss each issue and find solutions," she says.

The Association has assisted nearly 6,000 rape victims. Katsuva actively seeks out rape victims in remote locations, even carrying the weakest on her back to safety.

Katsuva took another unusual step by welcoming other women and girls into her home to live and work together. She has adopted 18 children, born from sexual assaults on other girls and women. Katsuva's own heartache spans three generations: Her mother helped with the Association's work, until she, too, was raped and killed.

In January 2009, former insurgents, newly integrated into the Congo military, came looking for Katsuva. They raped her (the fourth she has survived), and beat her, leaving her with scars on her neck, pains in her back, and swollen wrists. The former insurgents said they attacked Katsuva specifically because she had so often accused them of assaulting women.

Despite the constant possibility of another attack, Katsuva tells her story, and the stories of the women who seek help from the Association, to journalists, non-governmental organizations, human rights workers, and anyone else she believes might be able to help her fight for an end to impunity for crimes against women, reform of Congo's justice system and a future when life in Congo will be safe for women again. The goal is still far away, and the cell phone hanging around Katsuva's neck constantly rings with new pleas for help.

Today, some 180 women support the Association by selling the yam and cassava they grow on a communal garden. "We know if we ask you for food, tomorrow we will be hungry, but we have hands and we can work,"

"I have thought about ending my life many, many times," Katsuva says. "But then I see the children I have and the women who need support and I stop myself."



At a Glance:

Violence Against Women in the DRC

Snapshot...

- High levels of rape and other forms of sexual violence continued throughout the country, with a concentration in eastern DRC, where armed group fighters and government soldiers were the principal perpetrators. Many women and girls suffered gang rape, were raped more than once or were held in sexual slavery. Most victims did not receive medical or psycho-social care.

Source: Amnesty International Report 2009

- All parties continued to use mass rape and sexual violence with impunity, often as weapons of war, and to humiliate and punish individuals, victims, families, and communities. Between January and June, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) reported 2,075 cases of sexual violence in North Kivu, 834 in South Kivu, and 885 cases in Orientale. According to HRW, by September the total number of sexual violence cases registered at health centers in North and South Kivu exceeded 7,500, which was nearly double the total for the same period in 2008. During the year the International Rescue Committee registered approximately 1,200 cases of rape in South Kivu and it found that up to 80 percent of survivors identified their assailants as members of either the FARDC or armed groups. While the actual number of cases was likely much higher, lack of data, social stigma, lack of confidence in the judiciary, and fear of reprisals prevented many rape survivors from coming forward.

Source: US State Department 2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

- The majority of rapists went unpunished and women and girls lived in fear of reprisals if they reported the rape or even sought medical treatment.

Source: Amnesty International Report 2009

Impact...

- Sexual violence is the most widespread form of aggression against civilians in the DRC and the victims range in age from young girls to women in their 60s. The emotional consequences of sexual violence are that women lose their self-esteem and will to live. They become extremely anxious and fearful. The physical consequences of sexual violence are reported as disability, palpitations and headaches. Additionally, women who have been raped often face a lack of empathy and are rejected by their husbands, families and communities, leaving them without resources to live. All rape victims live with the fear of having contracted HIV/AIDS and many feel they do not have access to testing facilities.

Source: DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO - OPINION SURVEY AND IN-DEPTH RESEARCH, 2009, Ipsos/International Committee of the Red Cross. A total of 538 people aged 18 or over were interviewed in person (face-to-face) in the month of March 2009 in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Goma.



Activists in danger...

- Instead of addressing human rights concerns, DRC officials at the national and provincial levels continue to attack the organizations that raise them. For example, in July 2009 the Minister for Media and Communications and government spokesperson, Lambert Mende, accused national human rights NGOs of seeking to destabilize a democratically elected government. UN observers report a sharp increase in cases of harassment and arrests of human rights defenders in 2009, possibly reflecting heightened sensitivities ahead of elections in 2011.

Source: Democratic Republic of Congo: Human rights defenders under attack in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 02/17/2010, Amnesty International campaign digest.

Rare Posthumous Award for Extraordinary Service to the Republic of Poland

President of Poland to Award the late Ginetta Sagan with Highest Civilian Honor

On May 11, 2010, the President of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, will honor the late Ginetta Sagan with the **Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland**, the highest civilian honor bestowed on non-Polish nationals. The Order of Merit is given to recognize extraordinary service to the Republic of Poland, and only very rarely is it accorded posthumously. The award will be presented in a formal ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw.

Ginetta Sagan actively assisted the leadership of Solidarity in the 1980s, bringing financial assistance into Poland through a network of human rights defenders and acting in an advisory capacity to help strengthen and expand the Polish human rights movement. She traveled to Poland on several occasions between 1983 and 1988, working behind the scenes with Solidarity leaders including Lech Walesa and Zbigniew and Zofia Romaszewski.

In October of 1987 Ginetta traveled to Warsaw to help plan activities in Poland and Eastern Europe that would mark the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the following year. Taking a page from her work in the Italian Resistance during WWII, she helped Polish human rights leaders devise a plan to produce, illustrate, print and (clandestinely) distribute pamphlets and posters containing the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was during this visit that Polish authorities made an attempt on her life.

As she drove to visit the place where her parents had perished in 1943 – Auschwitz – the car she was in suddenly lurched off the highway at high speed and flipped several times. Ginetta, in the back of the car with no seat belt available, was badly hurt and very nearly died of her injuries. With her in the car were several Polish human rights defenders including Zbigniew Romaszewski, a former political prisoner and leader in the Solidarity movement. An examination of the vehicle later proved that the car had been sabotaged – its occupants were not meant to reach their destination alive.

Nearly a quarter-century later, Ginetta's dedication to Polish freedom has not been forgotten. Thanks to the efforts of Senator Zbigniew Romaszewski and Zofia Romaszewska, Ginetta Sagan's legacy will be recognized by the President of the Republic of Poland, a republic forged by the sacrifices of many courageous human rights defenders. We at the Ginetta Sagan Fund congratulate the Sagan family and offer our profound appreciation to President Kaczynski for this tremendous honor.

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AIUSA-SF office has moved again!

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defenders.***

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extraordinary work of human rights
advocates year after year.*

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