



Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Impunity for Gross Sexual Violence and Killing of Women at Munzenze Prison, Goma

To: The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Subject: Complaint Regarding DRC's Impunity for Gross Sexual Violence and Killing of Women and Munzenze Prison in Goma

Submitted by: [Women's Platform for Action International](#)

1. Introduction

The Women's Platform for Action International respectfully submits this complaint to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) regarding the mass atrocity at Munzenze Central Prison in Goma¹ on 27 January 2025, where over 150 female detainees were raped and burned alive. This horrific event occurred amid a mass jail break enabled by M23 rebel forces. It demonstrates extreme violations of women's rights, systemic impunity, and the DRC state's failure to fulfill its basic obligations under international law.

2. Impunity for Gross Sexual Violence and Killing of Women at Munzenze Prison and Denial of Safety, Justice, and Protection for Women in Detention

On 27 January 2025, during the M23 seizure of Goma, approximately 4,000 male prisoners escaped from Munzenze Central Prison. In the ensuing chaos, male inmates invaded the women's section, raping over 165 female detainees and setting the women's wing ablaze. Only 9 to 13 survivors were rescued, with over 132 women and at least 25 children were burned alive.

This massacre is not an isolated incident but part of a systematic and ongoing pattern of violence against women and girls in the DRC, particularly in conflict zones and custodial settings. Mass rapes and sexual torture have been extensively documented in the region, with women regularly used as weapons of war and targets of public humiliation. The failure of the state to prevent or punish such acts, including previous prison attacks and wartime atrocities, reflect a culture of entrenched impunity and sex-based discrimination.

UN officials, international human rights organisations, and local monitors have condemned the incident as a gross atrocity and emblematic of broader state failures. The DRC's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights require it to prevent, investigate, and remedy such violence. Yet to date, no credible investigations or accountability process has been initiated.

This incident represents a gross violation of international law, including:

¹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14438711/drc-prison-goma-fire-survivors-raped-women.html>



- **Rights to Life and Security of Person:** The deliberate rapes and burning alive of imprisoned women represent gross violations of the right to life and bodily integrity protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 6) and CEDAW Article 2(c), 5 and 12.
- **Sex-Based and Intersectional Discrimination:** Women detainees were deliberately targeted and denied protection. Sex and status-based discrimination is evident in the absence of state safeguarding measures within prisons and in times of conflict, and it breaches CEDAW Articles 1, 2 and 15.
- **Failure to Investigate and Prosecute:** There is no credible evidence of investigation or legal accountability for this mass atrocity. This violates DRC's due diligence obligations under CEDAW General Recommendation 35 and the Maputo Protocol.
- **Prohibitions of Torture and Cruel Treatment:** The acts of rape, burning, and mass killing constitute torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment prohibited under ICCPR Article 7 and CEDAW protections.
- **Denial of Detention Safety and Health:** Prison authorities allowed male inmates to freely access women's cells during a crisis. The lack of segregation, fire safety, and emergency response reflects structural neglect of women's safety in detention.

Despite being a State Party to both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Democratic Republic of Congo has failed to investigate or prosecute this flagrant violation. The conditions at Munzenze Prison, including being overcrowded and insecure, were well documented² prior to the incident, yet no reforms were made.

3. Our Call to Action

We respectfully urge the Commission on the Status of Women to:

- Condemn the atrocities at Munzenze Central Prison and categorize them as violations of women's rights under international law.
- Call for an independent and international investigation into the mass rape and killings, and accountability for perpetrators, including rebel actors or authorities complicit by omission.
- Urge the DRC Government to implement systemic reforms in prison management, including mandatory protection measures for women detainees, separation of male and female inmates, and adequate emergency protocols.
- Encourage international monitoring and victim protection, including reparations to survivors and families of victims.

The massacre at Munzenze Prison lays bare the Democratic Republic of Congo's failure to uphold its international obligations and safeguard the human rights of women in state custody.

² <https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/server/api/core/bitstreams/48fe131f-88fa-4761-9165-b3625dec88e9/content>



The impunity surrounding this mass atrocity marks a broader pattern of violence against women and girls in conflict contexts.

We respectfully request that the Commission elevate this matter and press for immediate remedial and preventive actions.

We thank the Commission for considering this submission.

Susannah Sjöberg
Secretary General