

The World March of Women 2010 in Bukavu

Demilitarising the eastern DRC to make it a region free from violence

A major success. These are the words which best describe the Third International Action of the World March of Women, whose closing activities were held in Bukavu (DRC) from 13 to 17 October 2010. Representatives from some 42 countries attended, and, on the final day, thousands of women took part in a peace march through the streets of Bukavu.

The Third International Action of the World March of Women (WMW 2010) took place over several months with numerous activities in many different countries. The Ibanda Institute served as the backdrop for the closing activities in Bukavu. The international event brought together over 1,000 people in some 148 delegations from 42 countries around the globe. It was covered by 78 national and international press and broadcast journalists.

The opening ceremony of the activities took place on 13 October in the evening with official speeches. The four speakers who took the podium in turn were the wife of the president of the DRC, the International Secretary of the World March of Women, the Congolese minister for gender, family and children, and the governor of South Kivu province.

The peace march through the town of Bukavu of more than 20,000 Congolese women and their sisters from other countries was the culmination of this global action, which also brought the MMF 2010 to a close.

Four key topics for women

As could have been expected, an important aspect of the WMW 2010 in Bukavu proved to be the panel discussions. The presentations followed by debates around the four topics of the March – women's economic autonomy; the common good and public services; peace and demilitarisation and violence against women – effectively pinpointed the true causes of the continuing insecurity in the eastern DRC. Causes which are intimately linked to the economic interests of Western countries in complicity with certain neighbouring countries. Yet, the absence of rural women from the debates was regretful. Being the main victims of violence by armed men, their testimony would have been enlightening. What is more, some men and women in power took advantage of the event to get women from the poorest areas of Bukavu to wear T-shirts bearing the insignia of their political parties thus opposing the collective demands of the other women, who were vociferous in underscoring their dignity as women. It was a political attempt to



hijack the event for the cost of a *pagne*, a T-shirt or on the strength of a mere promise.

To express their compassion for the women and girl victims of violence, to honour the survivors and to immortalise all those who have died as a result of the brutality they endured, the participants in the WMW planted a grove of trees in the Triangle of Nguba in Bukavu. They also visited a mass grave in Mwenga, about 100 kilometres from Bukavu, where 13 women were buried alive in 1999, after having been humiliated and tortured. The delegation also passed by the village of Kasika, in honour of the 1937 people who died there during the massacre on 23 and 24 August 1998.

Translating commitments into action

The objective of the WMW 2010 was to help consolidate peace and promote the lasting pacification of the eastern DRC in particular and of the country as a whole. To achieve this, the Congolese women, in unity with the women who had come from all over the planet, drew up a list of demands for the president of the

DRC and representatives of the international community.

The WMW 2010 was a success both in terms of the resources it mobilised and the content of the messages conveyed and discussed. The committee responsible for following up the achievements of the WMW 2010, which is coordinated by CONAFED (Comité National Femme et Développement – National Committee for Women and Development), now has the job of doing everything it can to ensure that the various commitments made are translated into action. In their speeches, DRC government representatives reiterated their promise to put the quest for and consolidation of peace, along with the fight to end violence against women, at the top of their agenda. We shall wait and see.

For more information, please see:
www.mmf2010.info

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