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A few weeks ago, the village of Kipupu in Eastern Congo was raided. Houses were set on fire, livestock was stolen and women were raped. Later, the bodies of 15 villagers were found: murdered. At least 200 persons have gone missing; they have been kidnapped and enslaved, or are also killed.

The Congolese gynecologist Denis Mukwege immediately publicly denounced these crimes. He called, as he has done many times before, for the implementation of the recommendations described in the "Mapping Report"; a United Nations investigation into the massacres and rapes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which killed millions of people in recent decades. This "Mapping Report" calls for an end to impunity, and to bring to justice those people who were responsible for the crimes committed in Congo.

As a consequence, doctor Mukwege – again - became a target of a very worrying, serious campaign of intimidation and threats on television and social media. The Mukwege family even receives death threats on private telephones.

In 2010 in Amsterdam, Denis Mukwege received the VanHeuven Goedhart medal from former Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers. Since then, the gynecologist developed his international reputation. Presidents Clinton, Obama, Macron and Chancellor Merkel, among others, received him over coffee and his brave work was recognized through international awards, amongst which the prestigious Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought and the Nobel Peace Prize.

Mukwege "repairs" women and girls who have been brutally raped, often by one of the many warring factions. Mukwege recovers damaged vaginas and anuses, ensures that women and girls, sometimes only a few months old, can urinate again and lead a life as ordinary as possible. And on top of that, he achieves a lot more. Mukwege tirelessly travels around the world to raise awareness on this cruel, horrific issue. Mukwege never hesitates to identify and accuse criminal groups. This makes him a much-threatened man. In 2012 he barely survived an attempt on his life. His daughters were threatened with machine guns pointing at their heads. A family friend was killed trying to protect the good doctor.

After the attack, Mukwege spent a few months in Europe, but at the urgent request of the Congolese women, Mukwege returned to Bukavu. His return flight was financed by the same women, who sold fruit and vegetables at the local market to be able to buy his ticket together.

Since 2012, Denis and Madeleine Mukwege have lived on the Panzi hospital compound. Until last March they were protected by soldiers from the peace mission Monusco, behind high fences and barbed wire. Even when his own mother passed away, the doctor needed heavy military protection to be able to attend her funeral. The Corona virus caused the departure of Monusco soldiers from the hospital compound. Due to budget cuts, Monusco cannot restore the responsibility for the protection of the hospital and the doctor.

Dr. Mukwege and his family pay a heavy price for their call for justice for the mutilated and raped women of Congo. The least we can do is support him unconditionally in his tough battle. We urge the United Nations to do everything withing their power to support Dr. Mukwege, his family and his Panzi Hospital. We ask the Dutch government to make every effort to convince the United Nations that the protection of Dr. Mukwege is of highest priority and urgently needed.

When Congo loses its brave doctor, it loses its last hope.

Tineke Ceelen

Director of the Dutch Refugee Foundation