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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Sixty-first session  
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**INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER  
PERSPECTIVE:  
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**Written statement\* submitted by Pax Christi International,  
a non-governmental organisation in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[8 February 2005]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO AND SUDAN

Reports of widespread sexual violence perpetuated against civilian women and girls in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Darfur region of Sudan have become all too common in recent months. Rape, assault and sexual mutilation are used ever increasingly as systematic weapons of war that are intended to shame and demoralise the enemy. Such tactics are not new to military conflict, but their practice has reached a scale of monstrous proportions in the hot zones of the DRC and Sudan.

The practice of rape in armed conflict is a clear violation of international humanitarian law and international conventions. When perpetrated as part of a campaign to change the ethnic composition of a community, rape becomes a tool of ethnic cleansing and therefore a crime closely linked to genocide. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has defined a wide range of sexualised violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and sterilisation as well as other forms of gender-based acts of violence and intimidation are condemned by the 1998 Rome Statute and violate all standards of human dignity.

While acknowledging the limitations of the ICC in its ability to prosecute only a small number of the perpetrators of sexual violence, we applaud the Court's competence to send a clear message regarding impunity for such crimes. No one, including those at the highest levels of national government, is exempt from responsibility for their actions or for those committed by others in their command. The lawlessness that prevails in the eastern DRC and in Darfur at this time has created a climate of impunity that leaves the civilian populations acutely vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Tragically, even those military personnel that have been entrusted with the honourable task of peacekeeping under the UN Mission to the Congo (MONUC) have been incriminated for gross sexual misconduct toward the local population. These heinous actions constitute a major violation of trust in the good intentions of the international community to end violence and not to perpetuate it. Such abuse must stop immediately, and perpetrators must be held responsible under the rule of law.

Pax Christi International therefore requests this Commission to adopt a resolution that includes an appeal to the Governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo and of Sudan, to:

1. Strongly condemn all acts of sexual violence against women and girls within their borders as a violation of international law and an affront to human dignity;
2. End the climate of impunity toward acts of sexual violence through the creation of competent courts and tribunals;
3. Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court without further delay (Sudan);
4. Actively promote a national commitment to education for human rights, including women's rights, and on the nature and prevention of sexual violence;
5. Direct resources to local communities that can assist victims of sexual violence to recover and localities to combat the stigmatisation of such persons;
6. Speed up efforts to establish peace and security in the eastern DRC and in the Darfur region of Sudan as an essential step toward the rule of law.

Pax Christi International also requests that the International Community, and more particularly the UN, to:

1. Give greater attention to the numerous acts of violence perpetrated against women in the DRC and Sudan;
2. Strengthen efforts to promote security and a sustainable peace in these countries;
3. Urge those States that commit personnel to MONUC to take decisive action in the prosecution of sexual offences while participating in peacekeeping missions;
4. Support the Victims and Witnesses Unit of the ICC in its work of assisting victims of sexual violence while ensuring protection and appropriate treatment throughout proceedings.

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