

## **INOVAS mourns the death of one of its founding members, Ms Anne-Marie Buhoro from Minova- Democratic Republic of Congo.**

On 28 January 2022, Ms Anne-Marie Buhoro, founder of the civil society organisation Vulnerable People and Women in Action for an Integrated Development Initiative (IPVFAD) supporting victims and survivors of gender-based violence in DRC, was brutally murdered by her husband at their home in Minova, a border-town located between the North and South Kivu Provinces. Anne-Marie, 43, was the mother of five children.

Minova was the site of a horrendous mass military rape of about 130 women and girls by Congolese soldiers after their humiliating defeat by rebel forces in 2012. The case was taken to trial and close to 75 survivors courageously testified.<sup>1</sup> Only two junior officers were convicted, and none of the implicated senior military officers was held to account. The trial left tens of survivors of this atrocity, in their own words, “tormented and without any solace. The dismal outcome of the trial was attributed to the failure of ill-equipped investigators and prosecutors to manage trials involving war crimes and crimes against humanity. As a result, sexual violence continued at the hands of troops in the hills around Minova as abusive rebel leaders were integrated into the regular army. The serious human rights abuses, that were made visible in the trial of perpetrators of mass rape in Minova, continued with total impunity.

This was the context of Anne-Marie’s critically important work in supporting victims and survivors of gender-based violence in a region that experienced some of the worst atrocities against girls and women. Entire communities have been ravaged by the culture of violence that plays out at every level of society, including intimate partner relationships.

As a committed advocate of human rights and women's rights, Anne-Marie led the fight against gender-based violence in DRC. She played a central role in the establishment of INOVAS and its expansion in DRC. Anne-Marie will be sorely missed, not only by her immediate family but also by the communities she worked with and by INOVAS. Our hearts are heavy with pain and grief at her passing and its impact on the women beneficiaries of her work in Minova.

INOVAS denounces this crime against one of its founding members. Anne-Marie's murder represents a great loss for victims and survivors regionally and internationally. INOVAS demands an urgent and impartial investigation in the murder of Anne-Marie and will continue to follow-up until justice is served.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see: Human Rights Watch 2015 Report entitled *Justice on Trial: Lessons from the Minova Rape Case in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Justice on Trial: Lessons from the Minova Rape Case in the Democratic Republic of Congo*

We will sorely miss her loving presence and enthusiasm as we continue to be inspired by her example to take forward the fight against injustice and impunity. May all who loved her find solace at this time and find the inspiration to continue the work she had initiated.