



# CIVIL COURAGE PRIZE

## Acceptance Speech

Dr. Denis Mukwege

2013

The Honorable John Train,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentleman,

Good evening!

Thank you for your invitation and for giving me the floor in this beautiful place.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the Train Foundation Trustees for honoring me today with the Civil Courage Prize, and supporting the struggle against sexual violence.

The Honorable John Train, by founding this award for "steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk," has chosen to speak out for human dignity to promote justice and peace, and to support the voice of the voiceless.

During the past fifteen years, the bodies of women of Congo have become the battlefield of the worst atrocities committed by armed groups. They have been largely ignored by the rest of the world.

Meeting these women completely changed my life.

My profession as a medical doctor led me to become a direct witness to a mass crime that is hard to fully understand because sexual violence targets our most precious resource: our mothers, our wives and our daughters.

Violence against women knows no social or cultural barriers.

It includes harmful practices that range from rape to domestic violence, to sexual harassment, and abuses by teachers and employers.

Rape is probably history's oldest and least condemned crime.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, rape as a strategy of war is even more destructive than military weapons.

Sexual violence crimes have been committed in a widespread and systematic manner not only to destroy a woman in her most intimate integrity, but also to tear apart her family and the community.

What is the *ultimate origin* of these atrocities?

Not only tribal or national hatred, but also mercantile greed.

The Congo produces minerals of the utmost interest to every modern economy. These include tin, tungsten, and tantalum—the three 'Ts' as they are often called.

Right now in the pockets of many of you here tonight, you have products made using these minerals. Your cell phone contains them.

[Struggles over the metals](#) in your cell phones have contributed to the loss of five million lives in my country, and earn some 185 million dollars a year for gangs who control access to the mines and collect bribes along the trade routes.

This has devastating consequences on the economy and it seriously impedes durable peace and sustainable development. Peace, justice, and the rule of law will enable us – the Congolese people — to benefit from the natural resources that we have.

The status quo is untenable.

This is why I am here tonight.

To draw the attention of the international community to this human tragedy.

To open your eyes and to urge all decision and policy makers to mobilize in order to put an end to rape as a weapon of war and to stand up for the dignity and empowerment of Congolese women.

Action towards sustainable peace and accountability needs to be taken now.

There is nothing inevitable about the situation. We can bring positive change to the Congo. We can end this war and we can stop sexual violence.

It's a joy for me to see women who have endured the most serious crimes begin to heal and to smile again after receiving holistic care at Panzi Hospital.

There is hope.

Every day, we admire the fierce determination and the courage of Congolese women, notably the survivors of sexual violence in the eastern Congo.

They are the ones fueling hope and inspiring my own determination to continue to work in South Kivu.

There is a path to a better future that addresses the root causes of the violence that plagues the entire region: the full implementation of the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region. We need the signatories of this Agreement to fully comply with their commitments.

And we need the international community to use all its influence and leverage to make this happen.

We are counting on civil society to speak out to hold all the relevant governments accountable.

Addressing the root causes of the violence will ultimately allow the Congolese people to finally benefit from the dividend of peace and development.

Everyone has the potential to make our humanity better.

I believe it is a moral obligation to stand up for human rights and to work to heal the victims so that they become survivors and to support their empowerment worldwide.

Allow me to dedicate this Civil Courage Prize to my patients and all survivors of sexual violence. I will continue to speak out to denounce the unacceptable until the violence stops.

We need to break the silence and address this human tragedy, combat impunity and make peace.

We need to struggle for human dignity and mutual respect among people and among Nations.

The Honorable John Train,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentleman,

I convey my sincere gratitude to all of those present tonight and ready to help and engage in bringing the positive change that will allow the women of Congo to envisage a better future for their children.

Together we can create change. We can end the violence. We can ensure justice and build peace.

We will prevail.

Thank you.