



2009

The Pax Christi International

# PEACE AWARD

## Justine Masika Bihamba Democratic Republic of Congo



The Pax Christi International Peace laureate for 2009, Justine Masika Bihamba, is a Congolese woman

who for many years has worked to improve the lives of rural women, defend human rights and assist victims of war, especially women who have been targeted by acts of sexual violence.

Ms Masika and her organisation assist women to find critical health care, legal services and psycho-social help.

Justine is the coordinator of *Synergie des femmes pour les victimes des violences sexuelles (SFVS)* Women's Synergy for Victims of Sexual Violence. It is a collective of 35 women's organisations that defends the dignity of women and girls who have been raped or otherwise traumatised by war-related sexual violence. The attacks against women and girls in the eastern DRC has rapidly increased in recent years. Hundreds of thousands have been raped, tortured and brutalised.

The continuing rape crisis in the DRC is part of a broader pattern of violence and systemic discrimination against women in the country. Very few perpetrators of these violent acts are brought to justice. In addition, rape survivors are frequently stigmatised, suffering social and economic exclusion.

SFVS works to educate the wider community on the effects of sexual violence and addresses policy decisions on matters that affect women and their families. These activities have drawn threats and intimidations from military and local officials in the region.

*The Pax Christi International Peace award highlights the work of contemporary peacemakers whose stories are less known and yet important to be told.*

A list of the previous Peace Award laureates is available on the website: [www.paxchristi.net](http://www.paxchristi.net)

The Pax Christi movement has gained considerable experience worldwide on which to build a credible programme in the Great Lakes region. It has found that viable solutions for peace and stability in Africa will often have a regional character; therefore Pax Christi works with regional networks to enhance collaboration and to reinforce local capacities for building peace. Since 2003 Pax Christi has given considerable focus to the Great Lakes francophone countries of Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

International Co-President Mgr Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, Archbishop of Kinshasa (DRC), has played a pivotal role in promoting Pax Christi efforts in the region. National Sections of Pax Christi have also worked closely with the International Secretariat to strengthen local capacities of Member Organisations in the network through Regional Consultations, the organisation of Peace Week activities and trainings on peacebuilding, non-violent action and other topics.

Rape has become prevalent as a weapon of war with widespread and tragic consequences.

Pax Christi International is pleased to recognize Justine Masika Bihamba for her strong commitment to a just peace in her country and for her tenacious service to women who struggle to recover and find healing and justice for war-related sexual violence.