

## Programme on international court launched in DRC

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Wednesday, 05 November 2008

The Institute of War and Peace Reporting (Netherlands) has launched a radio programme aimed at increasing public awareness in the Democratic Republic of Congo about war crimes trials taking place at the International Criminal Court, ICC, in The Hague, *according to a media release*.

The fortnightly programme, *Facing Justice*, was broadcast for the first time in October in Lingala, Swahili and French. IWPR's partner is Search for Common Ground, which will distribute the programme via a network of more than 90 partner radio stations around the country.

*Facing Justice* will draw on contributions from IWPR-trained journalists in DRC, staff at IWPR Netherlands, legal experts, civil society, political analysts, human rights activists and government representatives.

"The aim of the programme is to help Congolese citizens understand and contextualise the role of international justice in their country by providing them access to a broad range of voices knowledgeable on questions of the ICC and the challenges that the DRC justice system faces," said Stephanie Wolters, producer of *Facing Justice*.

"The programmes will draw upon local and international experts, activists, ICC personnel, ordinary Congolese citizens and Congolese government officials in its efforts to provide a comprehensive and objective picture of the ICC's activities, and the many challenges that Congolese face accessing justice in their own country."

The show was conceived after the IWPR Netherlands project team met local journalists and editors in the DRC last year. They confirmed that independent and balanced reporting on sensitive issues such as war crimes is currently lacking and that radio was an effective means of disseminating such reports.

Though the DRC has five nationals indicted before the ICC, recent surveys suggest most Congolese know little about the court. The vast majority believe it is important to hold those who committed war crimes accountable and that this will be necessary to secure peace in the country. Congolese people including the victims of war crimes would like to participate in ICC related activities but few know how to access information on the court.

Lena Slachmuis, director of Search for Common Ground in DRC, explained that *Facing Justice* is important because information on ICC proceedings is so limited in the country.

"It is very important to give out correct information to establish the impartiality of the ICC in the eyes of the Congolese, because it is not evident that it has that credibility," she said.

Slachmuis said that major delays in the ICC's first ever case, against DRC militia leader Thomas Lubanga, are hard for Congolese people to understand. Many have interpreted this as a signal the court is a political body.

"The collaboration with IWPR will help us bring out credible voices from the ICC to give information to the people in a regular way, so they can understand what is happening with the trial, and what the constraints and opportunities are with international justice," she said.

"Through IWPR we have access to clear, insightful information, and more information from the people who are actually running the ICC and who can help to explain it."

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The ICC has issued indictments against five Congolese - Thomas Lubanga, Germain Katanga, Mathieu Ngudjolo, Jean-Pierre Bemba and Bosco Ntaganda.

Lubanga was due to go on trial in late June, accused of recruiting child soldiers in the Ituri region, but the case was indefinitely postponed when judges said prosecution errors meant he could not get a fair trial. Prosecutors have appealed.

Judges recently confirmed charges including, rape, murder and sexual slavery against Katanga and Ngudjolo with their trial expected in 2009.

The charges against Bemba, Congo's former vice-president, relate to crimes of sexual violence allegedly committed by his troops in the Central African Republic. His confirmation of charges hearing is scheduled for early November.

Ntaganda, accused of war crimes in Ituri, remains at large. He currently commands the military wing of Laurent Nkunda's rebel force in North Kivu province.

**ABOUT IWPR**

Facing Justice is produced by IWPR Netherland's International Justice Programme. Launched in April 2008, IWPR-NL has media development projects in DRC, Uganda, Sudan, Serbia and the Balkans. It offers intensive hands-on training, extensive reporting and publishing to build the capacity of local media. IWPR-NL serves as a platform to give responsible local media a voice in their effort to contribute to justice and the rule of law. The mission of the worldwide IWPR network is to build peace and democracy through free and fair media. IWPR assists early democracies and societies in transition through the power of journalism.

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