

The 2008 Rafto Prize awarded to Pastor Bulambo Lembelembe Josué - DRC Church leader brings hope to eastern Congo

The Board of the Rafto Foundation for Human Rights awards the 2008 Rafto Prize to Pastor Bulambo Lembelembe Josué for his dedication to end the plight of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). His work brings hope for peace, reconciliation and human dignity to a people that have suffered from the deadliest conflict since World War II. The most frequent targets of this hidden war are women. In the last ten years in Congo, hundreds of thousands of women have been raped, many in excessively brutal gang rapes.

Pastor Bulambo's message is clear and simple: "We can no longer accept that our daughters, our sisters and our wives are raped. It should be possible for women to be safe. It is our responsibility to make life safe."

The DRC faces a grave humanitarian crisis resulting from what has become known as the First African World War. The war in the Congo is significantly linked to the Rwandan genocide. Many African countries and countless militia groups are involved. Since 1998 more than 5 million people have lost their lives, and ordinary civilians are disproportionately affected by the conflict. The Eastern Congo region is particularly unstable. Law and order has broken down, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate and fears are rising that the hostilities will escalate.

Women have been systematically abused and raped as a strategy of war. Children are kidnapped and forced into service as child soldiers and as sex slaves. The scale of the atrocities has created a society in which the norms of conduct have been broken down and women and children live in constant terror of brutal assault.

From this turbulent environment, Pastor Bulambo Lembelembe Josué emerges as a visionary church leader with high personal integrity and a unique ability to turn strategies into concrete action. He works ceaselessly and selflessly at the grassroot level to help the people of his country help themselves. Pastor Bulambo is also a team builder and has recruited competent local leaders who, under the most challenging of circumstances, run schools, support programs for child soldiers and survivors of rape.

Pastor Bulambo Lembelembe serves as Vice President of the Protestant Council of Churches, the *Eglise du Christ au Congo (ECC)*, in the DRC's South Kivu province. His prominence as a church leader has allowed him to preach democratic ideals in an effort to quell rising tensions between ethnic groups in the region.

Bulambo Lembelembe Josué is also the Vice President of *Héritiers de la Justice*, a human rights organization he helped to establish in 1991. The organization works to raise awareness of human rights, assists victims of human rights abuses and stop impunity from sexual violence. Bulambo stresses that no amnesty should be given to perpetrators of sexual violence.

As the president of the Pentecostal church (1995-2005), *Communauté des Eglises Libres de Pentecôte en Afrique* (CELPA), Pastor Bulambo initiated a rehabilitation program for women victims of rape (CAMPS). The program offers medical and psychological treatment, in addition to training and assistance to enable the women to start their own businesses and become valuable members of their society. A special focus is placed on building respect and dignity for women who suffer from the social stigma attached to victims of sexual assault.

Through CELPA, Pastor Bulambo Lembelembe Josué also established a program to help child soldiers. Approximately 40 per cent of these are girls, many of whom have been subjected to sexual violence in addition to traumatizing experiences as soldiers.

Bulambo Lembelembe Josué has shown a remarkable ability to organize and implement programs that have helped to relieve the suffering of civilians in the face of war. Furthermore, he has worked actively to create peace. He initiated, and is currently leading, a dialogue project that works at the local level to disarm and repatriate groups linked to the Rwandan genocide.

The international community has, despite a wide-ranging engagement, not yet succeeded in putting an end to the horrific acts of violence in the DRC. However, Bulambo Lembelembe Josué through his example and achievements is a source of hope that the Congolese themselves, through rebuilding their civil society, step by step can achieve reconciliation and secure the respect for human rights and human dignity. The Rafto Foundation calls on the international community to support their efforts.

The 2008 Rafto Prize is awarded at the National Venue of Theatre (Den Nationale Scene), in Bergen, Norway on Sunday 2nd of November at 18.00-19.30

Photos of the 2008 Rafto Prize Laureate Bulambo Lembelembe Josué:

http://www.rafto.no/publish_files/280808Raftoprismottaker2008_Pastor_Bulambo_Lembelembe_Josue.jpg

Picture text:

The 2008 Rafto Prize Laureate Pastor Bulambo Lembelembe Josué outside the office of *Communauté des Eglises Libres de Pentecôte en Afrique* (CELPA) in Bukavu, eastern Congo.

Photo taken: August 28, 2008. Photo: Tor Magne Kommedal/the Rafto Foundation

http://www.rafto.no/publish_files/270808Raftoprismottaker2008_Pastor_Bulambo_Lembelembe_Josue.jpg

Picture text:

The 2008 Rafto Prize Laureate Pastor Bulambo Lembelembe Josué outside the headquarters of Eglise du Christ au Congo (ECC) in Bukavu, eastern Congo. Photo taken: August 27, 2008.

Photo: Tor Magne Kommedal/the Rafto Foundation

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OBS! Bulambo speaks French, few words in English

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The Rafto Foundation in Bergen, Norway was established after the death of Professor Thorolf Rafto in 1986, in gratitude of his longstandig work to help people who are oppressed and persecuted, and in the realization that this work must be ongoing.

The Rafto Prize is a human rights award gaining international status. Several Rafto Laureates: Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma (Rafto Prize in 1990), people of East-Timor by Josè Ramos-Horta (Rafto Prize in 1993), Kim Dae-jung, South-Korea (Rafto Prize in 2000) and Shirin Ebadi, Iran (Rafto Prize in 2001) have subsequently been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The Rafto Prize contributes to a focus on human rights violations and on people and communities which need the attention of the world.