

Congolese woman wins Freedom Prize

Written by GIN

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(GIN) - "As a journalist, I found that Congolese women were silenced and I decided to battle for their freedom of expression."

Those were the words of Franchou (Chouchou) Namegabe Nabintu, a young radio reporter from the Democratic Republic of Congo, honored this month by the Washington DC-based Vital Voices Global Partnership for bringing the voices of women survivors of sexual violence to the air and a wide audience.

From a trainee at Radio Maendeleo in 1997, Namegabe became a full time staffer in 2002 and a year later, founded the Association of Women Journalists of South Kivu - a region torn by fierce fighting between the mainly Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda and other rebel groups such as the Mayi Mayi. Even the presence of the largest contingent of U.N. peacekeepers worldwide failed to guarantee the safety of women and children, she pointed out.

She continues to be outraged at the failure of the international community to speak up for the Congolese women who have suffered unspeakable atrocities. In 2007, she traveled to the International Court of Justice to denounce the Court's failure to indict rebel leaders for rape and other sexual crimes.

This week Namegabe was warmly received by an overflow crowd at the Womens Enews service in New York for her commitment to women's rights. She was joined by the Congolese Ambassador to the U.S., Faïda Mitifu, and Mohamed Keita, Africa researcher with the Committee to Protect Journalists.