**‘Plus jamais ca’ – Judicial Colloquium on Sexual Violence in DRC**

On Friday 1st November, the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law hosted a network event at The Hague Institute for Global Justice on the occasion of a Judicial Colloquium on Sexual Violence and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which took place in The Hague from 28 October – 1 November 2013.

On behalf of Minister Ploumen, Mr. Swartbol, Director General for International Cooperation of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, opened the meeting by stressing that the fight against sexual violence is far from over. On behalf of the minister, he highlighted that the violence is ever more horrific and survivors, suffering from physical damage, emotional trauma and social stigma, are in desperate need for justice and compensation. Judges are important change makers in communities and in society to this effect, but they are not alone. Communities and their leaders are the ones who must solve the root causes. The Netherlands will continue to support their efforts and to help finding solutions at the international, regional and national level in order to bring relief and to promote progress in Eastern Congo.

Mr. Denis Mugweke - founder and medical director of Panzi Hospital in the DRC and active human rights defender, who has treated thousands of victims - provided a keynote speech. He underlined the importance of the acknowledgment of victims of sexual violence as well as ensuring access to reparations. Panzi Hospital aims to provide medical care as well as free access to justice for these victims. He further emphasized that the fight against sexual violence is an international responsibility and praised the Dutch efforts to fight impunity, which are necessary for us to be able to say ‘plus jamais ca’.

During the ensuing discussions, it was generally acknowledged that the biggest challenge is not only collecting evidence but also adjudicating without evidence. Three issues are considered to be crucial: to repair the dignity of the victims, to hold perpetrators accountable and to establish an historical account. Therefore, it is important to train historians, doctors, and judges as well as other relevant actors to more effectively document sexual violence to help victims to obtain access to justice.

The network event was the closing of a judicial colloquium on sexual violence in the DRC which was attended by a distinguished group of judges from the DRC and which was organized by the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation, Physicians for Human Rights and Brandeis University. It aimed to find ways to improve dealing with sexual violence cases. The colloquium provided a first opportunity for the judges to share lessons learned and experiences on the challenges of addressing sexual violence in national courts with their colleagues from international courts. Apart from judges, also medical practitioners, NGOs and academics took part in the colloquium.

This colloquium represents a first step towards a network of international and national judges to fight impunity and help victims. Together with the international judges, the judges from the DRC will continue to fight impunity and to protect victims of sexual violence.