Missing Peace workshop in Uganda draws 70 African experts on wartime sexual violence; UC Berkeley releases new study on accountability for sexual violence

Kampala, Uganda—As part of a global movement to end wartime sexual violence, more than 70 legal, health, and law enforcement leaders from six African countries will meet in Kampala, Uganda, August 26–28, to discuss strategies for seeking justice and supporting survivors.

The Missing Peace Practitioners’ Workshop will take up new findings from a groundbreaking, four-country study on conflict-related sexual violence to be launched at the workshop by the Sexual Violence Program of the Human Rights Center, UC Berkeley School of Law. The study, in part, highlights barriers to investigating and prosecuting sexual violence and recommends better training and more funding for the local healthcare workers and police officers on the front lines.

The workshop builds on the UK’s Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict spearheaded by actress Angelina Jolie last summer and the 2013 Missing Peace Symposium in Washington, DC.

“There is so much focus on what the International Criminal Court is or is not doing about sexual violence committed as a war crime, crime against humanity, or act of genocide,” said Kim Thuy Seelinger, director of the Human Rights Center’s Sexual Violence Program, “But it’s the nurse at the county clinic or the rural police officer who can actually play a central role in the pursuit of justice, even when the crime violates international law.”

The workshop provides a rare opportunity for frontline responders from Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan to collaborate.

“These experts and practitioners are those closest to survivors,” said Ketty Anyeko, transitional justice expert with the Uganda Fund—The Fund for War-Affected Children and Youth in Northern Uganda. “Their work can be challenging because victims are sometimes unwilling to pursue legal justice—fearing revenge, stigma, or loss of child support.”

Organizers include the Human Rights Center, Uganda Fund—The Fund for War-Affected Children and Youth in Northern Uganda, United States Institute of Peace, the Peace Research Institute of Oslo, and Women in International Security.

“Whether in violent conflict, extremist settings or in the domestic sphere, we must create a zero tolerance for this form of violence,” said Kathleen Kuehnast, senior gender advisor at the U.S. Institute of Peace. “Just as the world community outlawed slavery in the 19th century and landmines in the 20th century, we must outlaw sexual violence in the 21st century.”

Innocent Zahinda Balemba, who heads the Office of the UN Special Representative to the Secretary General on Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict under Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, will address the workshop on August 26.