

Foreword

From 2013 through the middle of 2016, someone was abducting and raping little girls in the village of Kavumu, not far from my hospital in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During those two years, over forty children aged from eighteen months to ten years of age were stolen from their homes in the middle of the night, raped, and left to be found by morning. The victims were so young and small that these experiences left them with serious injuries. Day after day, week after week, these children were brought to us at Panzi Hospital for surgery and counselling. As I stood over each child on the operating table, I felt an urgent desire to help their families and communities seek justice.

So, in addition to providing all the medical care and psychosocial support we could, my team also joined with legal experts and other human rights defenders to push the local authorities to investigate and prosecute these systematic crimes. It turned out the villagers of Kavumu all knew who was responsible: a member of the provincial parliament who controlled local militia and who was abusing children with impunity. It was not easy, but with strategic partnerships and survivors brave enough to testify against a powerful person, we were able to secure convictions for crimes against humanity.

This book tells a related tale. The story of Hissène Habré is well known throughout the African continent. Perhaps it started as a tale of a brilliant young politician who stood up to Gaddafi. It became the story of a Chadian president who became increasingly paranoid and repressive of political opposition at home, even while he was supported by powerful friends abroad. It ended with his trial not in the Hague but at the far end of the Sahel, in a Senegalese courtroom where he was convicted of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of torture—including widespread sexual violence.

The lessons of the trial of Hissène Habré echo what we learned in a smaller scale in Kavumu. It shows the immense promise of national courts in addressing international crimes, despite daunting challenges. It also highlights the value of strategic partnerships to strengthen investigation and prosecution of these crimes, including between local and international actors. But most importantly, the Habré case demonstrates the boundless patience and power of survivors pursuing justice, however long it might take. Without the men and women who were willing to testify against their former president, there would never have been a case, much less a conviction.

This book is the first volume of its kind to present the historic trial of Hissène Habré from its many angles. The volume is brought to us by a stellar team of editors with complementary areas of expertise and attention. Sharon Weill and Kerstin Carlson combine their experience studying hybrid courts and the role of national tribunals in delivering justice for international crimes. Kim Thuy Seelinger brings her expertise in conflict-related sexual violence as well as her sensitivity to the experience of survivors, witnesses, and individual practitioners moving through the legal process. I commend the editors for showing profound respect for the African practitioners who personally delivered the case, by presenting their words and perspectives as the heart of the book. Their chapters are framed by historical and academic analysis that will be valuable to so many of us who are not lawyers or

judges ourselves. This is truly a thoughtful, informative, and provocative volume that helps us look frankly at the Habré trial and the larger, complicated project of international criminal justice itself.

Despite its challenges, the Habré trial gives me great hope in the prospect of accountability for atrocity crimes. More importantly, the case should serve as an inspiration to survivors in other countries, including my own homeland. Impunity cannot stand—even for the powerful. With the courage of survivors and the efforts of serious jurists, we can reach justice together.

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