

I am Matadi Mayo and I want to tell my story because it's not only about what happened to me but to many women in my country. Congo. Democratic Republic of Congo. DRC.



Being a doctor was always my dream. When I was little, every single individual in my street was calling me when they have a problem or some injury. They were calling me "doctor" when I was the age of six or seven or eight. I was even writing on all my books *Doctor Doctor* and people are telling me I'm *débile*—weak in the head. Crazy. They did not know that the dream can come true. End of story: I became a doctor.

I did my residency and then I have to tell you that people from all over Congo and even other countries in Africa would come to my hospital for the good medical care. In the hospital we always speak in the language of the patient. It's very important in Africa to know how to communicate in different languages—the official language, French, but also our other local languages.

So I always talked to the patient. I was always interested in their history. One lady came, she was about 20. She came with a fracture of humerus left upper arm. She had a fracture and she had a lot of abrasions, wounds and injuries, bruises, on her body and I ask why does she have this. She said she was raped. The soldiers they came—four or five government soldiers—and they rape and also introduce bottles in the vagina.

She was one I remember but many times we received women from the east part of the country where the war was in Goma, Kivu, next to Rwanda, and they were raped. The soldiers think they are above the law and also they were using things like certain instruments, wood, iron to rape. Sometimes I see fistula so bad urine and stools mix

together and they can go out through the vagina. From germs and bacteria this brings a lot of complications like infections and if we don't act quickly the patient will die.

Some of the patients they are rejected by their family. *Go far from here!* because they think she has been raped so she has AIDS. The oldest woman I saw who was raped, she was 75 years old and her family rejected her. I gave her the HIV test and it was negative.

It was really sad, really really sad. The women lose heart. They need psychological help to gain some confidence again. They feel they are useless. They are not important now to society. And for the soldiers, no punishment, nothing. These are soldiers and people in high-up position and so they do it and know nobody is going to follow up the situation. It's not a secret. You can go today and Google and find all the things that I'm saying.

But I have responsibility for my patients. I was putting myself in their shoes and so I have to do something good for them. I'm just a little person. Maybe my voice can't be listened to but if not me, who is going to do it? So I spoke out.

That was when the secret police sent me a summons.

The secret police, they know all about you even though you do not know them. They have the people they give money so they could tell about you. They have the communications. They are watching you. They follow you, knowing your life, how everything is going, they know your family.

They ask me, *Why you want to spoil the image of the country?* I could not contain myself. I tell them *This is not how you want for your mother, your sister. How would you feel?* One of them beat me so bad, my face was all swollen, and they put me in the jail. I'm telling you: Do not go to jail in Africa! In the place was too dark and they have feces all over and they make me pick them up with my hands, can you imagine that?

When they release me, I go to my parents and I have to tell them what is going on. They say, *Your presence here is the risk for us* so I went to hide. Also I went to work at a different hospital and change my appearance so they could not recognize me.

Communication with my parents was difficult and careful because the secret police might listen. They can tell where calls come from and who calls. So I was taking SIM card and changing it and changing my voice so people cannot understand this is me.

But I wanted to see my family. One day I started to go there and a group of people come to me. With knives in their hand and they say, *You are destroying the image of the country.* They took me and they told me to put off my clothes. They have a hammer and they beat me and they say, *When we beat you, you will say 'I will not spoil the image of my country.'* So I have to say the same thing, over and over while they was beating me. *I will not spoil the image of my country. I will not spoil the image of my country.*

Look, you can see on my legs. These ones. And here more scars. And on back. And they beat me with chains. They was beating me all the time and then I wasn't able to repeat what they want because I was crying. The last thing was they tortured me with electricity. After that, I don't know what happened. I found myself in the hospital.

How I get away, it's a long story, but I have a family member, someone I didn't know well. He lives here, Los Angeles, and he accepted me to live with him. But I'm telling you it's not easy. Everything I have to buy I have to ask like a baby from him. I can't contribute and we are four people in the room so it's hard.

I want to reach out my hand to give, not to take. But it is so sad to not practice my profession. I feel very sad that I can't help people with the knowledge that I have.

In my country I work with international health organizations and I had all the credentials, but how to be licensed to practice in the United States, this I don't know. Everybody tell me it's a long process. At Kaplan University in Pasadena they told me I have to pay \$18,000 to be in the training and if I pass the test, that is Step One only. I don't know how to get this money. I am looking for other people who have this experience so they can share with me what they have done. Is there some other way, without \$18,000? So where to go? Where to knock? Who will help me to open the doors? If only somebody would know the good way, who could say *Knock here*.

A lot of people, even friends, they discourage you. They say you can forget about what you did before. Here you become somebody else.

But I will do it. I know I can.

What keep me focused—two things. The speech of our president, where he spoke "Hope is what led me here today." Yes, I call Obama my president because I am living here and I am included. He said, "There is hope in ordinary people to do extraordinary things." And I know I'm ordinary people.

Second thing, the Bible. So, Hope and Faith.

But sometimes, I feel useless.

I think about my family and it's hard. When I was there, with the money I was making, I was helping my mother. I was providing. Now not very often I am able to talk to her. International calling cost some money, so it's hard. She says, *We need to see you*. That's the heart of a mother and I miss her too much. She's crying while she talks to me.

Now she is selling firewood. Imagine that. Mother of a doctor selling firewood.