

DRC schoolgirls used as weapons of war – report

DRC pupils were raped, forced into marriage and used as human shields by militias who believed they had ‘magical powers’ during violence over a year ago, an investigation by a group of charities has indicated. A report on the [allAfrica](#) site notes that the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) said its research into the year-long violence in Congo's central Kasai region, which largely ended in 2017, found that female students suffered multiple abuses by armed groups. Based on interviews with more than 55 students and teachers, the report documents testimonies from survivors and witnesses of how militiamen attacked hundreds of schools – kidnapping girls for sexual slavery, forced marriage and to serve as child soldiers. **‘Militias believed in their magical powers, and often used them as the first line of defence to rustle their skirts to ward off soldiers with guns,’** said Diya Nijhowne, GCPEA's executive director. The UN said the conflict in Kasai, which pitted the Congolese army and allied Bana Mura militia against the Kamuina Nsapu militia, left up to 5 000 people dead.