

Kenyan Women To Sue British Army For Alleged Rapes

By: Jennifer Friedlin

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DOL DOL, Kenya (NNPA)—Karamas Walebutunui says she was always scared of the British soldiers stationed near her remote tribal village in northern Kenya. Stories abounded of soldiers raping the pastoralist Masai women as they herded sheep and goats through the vast grasslands. Then, about 10 years ago, Walebutunui claims, her fears came true.

"I saw the men coming and I started running away but then they started emerging from the bush," recalled Walebutunui, ruffs of red, yellow and black beads wrapped around her neck and looped through her stretched earlobes. "I tried to scream and cry but there was no one to help me. When they got hold of me, five men raped me. That's all I remember."

Walebutunui is one of approximately 600 women from the nomadic Masai and Samburu tribes who have recently come forward alleging they were raped over a period of 30 years by British soldiers on rotation in

northern Kenya for training exercises.

After years of living silently with their claims, the women are now preparing to file the equivalent of a class-action against the British Army. They have hired Martyn Day, a British solicitor who recently won a \$7.4 million settlement for more than 230 residents of the Dol Dol region maimed by live munitions left by Britain's armed forces.

During a recent visit to Dol Dol, a dusty village without electricity or paved roads, Day said he took the women's case once he determined that there were enough medical records, police reports and transcripts to support some of the allegations and to prove the British army's negligence in failing to stop the attacks.

In at least eight instances, reports of the alleged rapes were made to the British army, Day said. And a transcript of a meeting held in 1983 indicates that tribal chiefs approached British military officers with the accusations. The rapes, however, allegedly continued for nearly two more decades.

Standing before 300 Masai

women, their vibrant wraps and beads creating a sea of orange and red under the bright Kenyan sun, Day said he would relish the chance to try their case against the British Army.

"I think it is so absolutely appalling what the British Army has done that I would love to see them in the witness box defending their position," said Day.

Maj. Rachel Grimes, a spokesperson for the Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police, said the British military was investigating the crimes and is "treating the allegations very seriously." She declined to discuss specific findings of the investigation or to discuss the army's response to the accusations.

If the British army fails to respond to the claims by the fall, Day said he would proceed with the lawsuit. In the meantime, he is evaluating the hundreds of allegations that have poured out from villages located near the training grounds.

One of those villages, Archer's Post, is accessible only by a dirt road that stretches through expansive reserves of

elephants and impala. Here, more than 200 claimants say the British hunted them like animals.

Haliwa Milgo, a Muslim resident of this predominantly Christian Samburu village, says she was raped 20 years ago while washing clothes in the river.

As three soldiers approached her and her young niece, two wooed the child with biscuits while the third pulled her 300 feet and tackled her to the ground, she says. With her face pushed against the dirt, Milgo, now 42, says she was raped from behind.

After the alleged attack, Milgo says rumors spread through the town. When her father, a devout Muslim from Somalia, heard of what happened, Milgo said he was too ashamed to go to the authorities.

"In this clan, a girl is not supposed to go with any man. She is supposed to stay with the family until she is married," said Milgo, who was unable to marry because of the stigma of the alleged rape.

Nine months later Milgo gave birth to a mixed race boy. He, too, has faced difficulties. Kids in school mockingly called him "mzungu," or white person.

He has had a hard time finding work to raise the money for a university education.

Although Milgo and many of the other alleged victims attribute their hardships to the rapes, proving a large proportion of these cases so many years later will be difficult. Milgo only has the testimony of her family and a man who supposedly witnessed the attack to substantiate her claims.

DNA testing to identify her son's father would be nearly impossible since Milgo admits that she would have a hard time picking out the suspected man from all the soldiers who pass through Archer's Post in a given year.

"To me, these people look alike. I can't distinguish one from the other," said Milgo of the British.

Whatever the outcome of the lawsuit, the alleged rapes appear to have shaken up life in these villages in more ways than one.

Rebecca Samaria, a women's rights activist in Archer's Post, says she spent years complaining about the alleged rapes to the all-male Samburu chiefs. But they barely listened.

As the rapes allegedly continued, husbands walked out on their wives, taking the family's precious cows and any other valuable possessions, as is their right in Samburu culture.

In response, Samaria, 38, started an independent village in 1990 where 25 abandoned and impoverished women now live and work. Today, the women support the humble collective of mud and dung huts by pooling their resources. They sell beaded jewelry and run a campsite and cultural center for tourists. The proceeds have been used to establish a primary school and to send a couple of children to a university.

In the safe haven of the collective, the women also debate issues such as female genital mutilation and domestic violence, an accepted part of Samburu tradition.

"We have decided to start the group to uplift our lives," said Samaria, the sound of women singing in Samburu and dancing echoing through the camp. "These days the women are coming up very nicely and taking care of their families and making their family to be strong."

Man Kills Wife After She Sought Protection, Then Commits Suicide

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP)

A woman who said her estranged husband was stalking her has been shot to death, and he turned the gun on himself in an apparent homicide-suicide, detectives say.

The bodies of Helen Hampton Lycklama, 54, and John Lycklama, 58, were found

Tuesday evening in the master bedroom of his upscale home with a .357 Magnum revolver between them on the bed, Clark County sheriff's Sgt. Dave Trimble said.

An autopsy Wednesday showed the woman, a schoolteacher in Portland, Ore., had been shot in the head, and

other injuries indicated she tried to defend herself in a struggle, Trimble said.

The man, a local home builder, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

Detectives believe the shootings occurred Aug. 1, the day the two had made plans to meet at a Hazel Dell restaurant, possibly to

discuss their pending divorce.

Records show the Lycklamas were married in August 1995, and sheriff's deputies said they had no reports of domestic violence involving the couple.

In April, however, Helen Lycklama filed for divorce and obtained a restraining order that

barred him from molesting or disturbing her or coming within 1,000 feet of her home or workplace.

"I believe my husband is stalking me," her request for the order stated.

According to her request, after she left him for the first time in the spring of 2002 and

was house-sitting for her daughter, he threatened to kill himself in December 2002 but later relented.

The Lycklamas were scheduled to appear in court next month to talk about trying to settle their divorce without going to trial.

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