



**For immediate release**

## **The SURF calls on International Action to Support Women Survivors in Rwanda for International Widows' Day**

**(LONDON - 22nd June 2006)** Ahead of International Widows' Day, on Friday 23rd June 2006, Survivors Fund (SURF) has called for the international community to act to support women survivors widowed in the Rwandan genocide who were raped and infected with HIV/AIDS.

Through funding from the Department for International Development, SURF is facilitating a five-year programme supporting 2,500 women survivors with antiretroviral treatment. In addition, through private donations, SURF supports a further 300 women on the programme. But there are a further 7,000 women still awaiting access to treatment. Many of these women are widows, who are solely responsible for orphans of the genocide. Treatment enables them to lead a healthy and economically active life again, and support their families.

As well, many widows have recently been targeted for giving evidence against perpetrators of the genocide at *gacaca* (village court) trials. The perpetrators have given amnesty in the name of national reconciliation, but no measures have been taken to provide protection to survivors. As widows die from AIDS related illnesses, or through retribution, their testimony is lost forever

SURF Founder and Director Mary Kayitesi Blewitt will speak on these issues at the International Widows' Conference organised by The Loomba Trust and Chaired by Cherie Booth QC at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London on 23rd June. She will call on delegates to act now to support widows of the genocide:

*"Action that is needed is threefold. Funding to enable the remaining widows who were raped during the genocide and are now HIV positive to access treatment. Second, we need the international community to review the gacaca courts and the continued killing of survivors and to introduce a witness protection programme. Thirdly, a programme must be developed as a matter of urgency to collect and archive the testimonies of the widows before it is too late."*

**For further information, please contact:**

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## **Notes to editors:**

### **What is the Survivors Fund?**

Survivors Fund, or SURF, is a charity dedicated to aiding and assisting the survivors of the Rwandan genocide. Since 1997, SURF has been supporting medical care for women survivors with HIV/AIDS, providing counselling for survivors, vocational training and home building for orphans. The work ensures that the:

- Voices of survivors are listened to and heard
- Memories of the genocide are kept alive
- Victims of the genocide are never forgotten
- Survivors of the genocide are supported - in Rwanda and the UK

### **Over the past year, SURF has:**

- Provided grants for 5000 households for Income Generating Projects.
- Built over 70 homes for child-headed households, giving shelter to 5 survivors.
- Provided vocational training to 360 children, and supported 370 children with school fees.
- Built 22 mass graves, giving thousands of victims of the genocide a decent burial

In 2006 we hope to build 5000 new homes for survivors, a further 23 mass graves and to complete work on the Resource and Testimony Centre.

For more information, please visit: [\*\*www.survivors-fund.org.uk\*\*](http://www.survivors-fund.org.uk)