



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 15, 2023

WHO Paid Sexual-abuse Victims in Congo Just \$250 Apiece

The World Health Organization (WHO) has paid some of its Congolese victims of sexual abuse a mere \$250 apiece — and even that came with strings attached.

“To address the biggest known sex scandal in the U.N. health agency’s history,” the WHO “paid \$250 each to at least 104 women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo who say they were sexually abused or exploited by officials working to stop Ebola” during 2018-2020, the [Associated Press](#) reported on the basis of an internal WHO report. “The amount covers typical living expenses for less than four months in a country where, the WHO documents noted, many people survive on less than \$2.15 a day.”

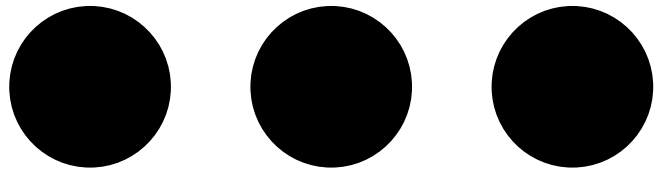
Furthermore:

The payments to women didn’t come freely. To receive the cash, they were required to complete training courses intended to help them start “income-generating activities.” The payments appear to try to circumvent the U.N.’s stated policy that it doesn’t pay reparations by including the money in what it calls a “complete package” of support.

The WHO’s “survivor assistance fund” for its sexual-abuse victims, primarily those in Congo, was budgeted at \$2 million. The parsimonious pill pushers have thus far shelled out just one percent of that with no apparent plans to spend any more. An internal WHO document from October said that around one-third of known victims were “impossible to locate,” while several women declined the agency’s oh-so-generous offer.

Dr. Gaya Gamhewage, who heads up the WHO’s sexual-abuse prevention efforts, seemed relatively unconcerned when interviewed by the AP. “There is nothing we can do to make up for (sexual abuse and exploitation),” she said.

The WHO told the AP that criteria to determine its “victim survivor package” included the cost of food in Congo and “global guidance on not dispensing more cash than what would be reasonable for the community, in order to not expose recipients to further harm.”



AP Images
People in Beni, Democratic Republic of the Congo, waiting for and Ebola vaccine in 2019



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Gamhewage said the WHO was following recommendations set by experts at local charities and other U.N. agencies.

“Obviously, we haven’t done enough,” Gamhewage said. She added the WHO would ask survivors directly what further support they wanted.

Clearly, Gamhewage needed prodding by the AP even to give lip service to additional compensation. WHO documents stated that the two victims with whom Gamhewage met (while pulling down \$231 per diem) during a three-day visit to Congo in March said their greatest desire was for the “perpetrators to be brought to account so they could not harm anyone else.” The WHO was apparently satisfied to leave it at that.

The AP managed to find three victims, identified only by first name, who told a different story. All three — Alphonsine, 34; Denise, 31; and Audia, 24 — said they were pressured into having sex with WHO employees in exchange for jobs; Audia now has a five-year-old daughter as a result. All three said they were paid \$250 by the WHO, but only after taking a baking course (and, in Audia’s case, also a tailoring course). Audia called the payment “really insufficient.” Alphonsine told the AP that “she later went bankrupt and would have preferred to receive a plot of land and enough money to start her own business.”

None of them trusts the WHO to clean up its act. “They promised to show us evidence this has been taken care of,” said Denise, “but there has been no follow-up.”

It’s not as if the WHO is starved for resources, the AP noted:

The internal documents show that staff costs take up more than half of the \$1.5 million the WHO allotted toward the prevention of sexual misconduct in Congo for 2022-2023, or \$821,856. Another 12% goes to prevention activities and 35%, or \$535,000, is for “victim support,” which Gamhewage said includes legal assistance, transportation and psychological support. That budget is separate from the \$2 million survivors assistance fund, which assists victims globally.

The WHO’s Congo office has a total allocated budget of about \$174 million, and its biggest funder is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

But the agency is part of an organization that is [rife with sexual abuse](#) and, being totally unaccountable, has little incentive to root it out. In 2021, the AP [discovered](#) that senior WHO managers were aware of the sexual exploitation during the Ebola outbreak but did little to stop it; none was fired over it.

Instead, the WHO tried to cover its own derriere. According to the AP, “At least one woman who said she was sexually exploited and impregnated by a WHO doctor negotiated compensation that agency officials signed off on, including a plot of land and health care. The doctor also agreed to pay \$100 a month until the baby was born in a deal ‘to protect the integrity and reputation of WHO.’”

A WHO-commissioned panel concluded that there were at least 83 victimizers during the Ebola outbreak, about a quarter of whom were WHO staffers. The agency now says a whopping five staffers have been fired for sexual misconduct since 2021. And it “took years of pressure from Congolese authorities” to get the WHO to share any information about the alleged perpetrators with them, wrote the AP.

Audia likely spoke for much of the rest of the world, which suffered under WHO-recommended Covid-19



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“mitigation” measures, when she told the AP, “I can’t put my trust in (WHO) anymore.”

Her reasoning, though, was more personal: “When they abandon you in such difficulties and leave you without doing anything, it’s irresponsible.”



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