

# SEMA

a film about survival made by survivors

**PRESS KIT  
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## THE INSPIRATION OF THE FILM

The eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo has been devastated by more than two decades of war. During the conflict, there has been an epidemic of the use sexual violence of a weapon of war.

Rape in wartime is used to terrorize and destabilize whole communities. The perpetrators of these rapes attack victims with extreme violence, which in many cases results in death, destruction of the genitals and other organs of the body, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, depression and severe anxiety.

Survivors face crippling social stigma that prevents them from seeking justice, excludes them from their community and leaves them left on their own to support their children.

Thanks to the support of Panzi Hospital, Dr. Denis Mukwege and the courage of survivors, The National Movement of Survivors of Sexual Violence in the DRC was formed. The Movement today has nearly 2000 members who organize themselves to fight against this violence by speaking on their own behalf. Based on the premise that "together, their voices are stronger than silence," they organize advocacy and awareness-raising activities to respond to and end these rapes and sexual violence, thus fighting stigma and documenting what happened to them.

The Movement decided to create a film to create a retelling of what a survivor of sexual violence faces. The survivors of The Movement came together to write the script based on their own real experiences. The majority of the acting roles are played by the survivors themselves. In order to truly create a powerful film, they bravely reenacted their own traumas. They realise the benefit of artistic expression as part of the healing process.

It will be used as a tool for advocacy and communication: for other victims and Congolese society as well as raising awareness around the world of the level and extent of the atrocities that survivors of conflict based sexual violence face. The film demystifies common myths that can be heard about sexual violence and will be used in outreach sessions organized by survivors in their communities, churches or youth groups. It will be disseminated in bordering African countries facing cases of massive sexual violence, as well as at festivals and conferences abroad to raise awareness of the issues of sexual violence in conflict and amplify the voice of survivors in the world.



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## THE STORY



The film SEMA (which means speak out in Swahili) follows the lives of two women from different backgrounds whose lives are changed forever by rape, who must find the strength to survive and make a difference for themselves and their children.



Kimia is a devoted University student who went to fetch water one evening so that her morning would be free to be prepared for an exam. At the lake, men that looked like police came out of the bushes and attacked them. One man's scar would forever stay in her memory...

Matumaini and other women in her village do most of the work in the household; they do chores, work the fields and take care of the children. Despite the difficult labor, the women are friends and support each other in the village. One evening as they were returning home from the fields, armed militia ambushed them with machetes. Not everyone survives the night...

Six years later, Kimia and Matumaini must find a way to overcome their traumatic past and find hope for the future.





# SEMA

A film of survival made by survivors

DIRECTED BY MACHERIE EKWA PRODUCED BY MOUVEMENT DES SURVIVANTES DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CAJLHV MUSIC BY VSJH ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
STARRING ARMANDE AND MATIMAINI LDJBKJBWKCH K/BHFRLEFESUGSERGURBW:KVBKCUGEJBD FKHVWKY CAGGCHBKHVWCWBK VCW  
;ICGU;IHVCDYDYGCL;YCDWYF;I YTCFDSFIYC COMING SOON G UAEUTIUTYOXVKHCBCYALTRYBCT;BCRCT; XY

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## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

At only 25 years old, Congolese Macherie EKWA is a young genius of international cinema. She is celebrated for her film Maki'la which premiered at the Berlinale and was featured at the Cannes International Film Festival. After hearing of her success, The National Movement of Survivors reached out to her to make the film SEMA.



Deeply concerned in social issues, Macherie Ekwa accepted the challenge of shaping the story written by the women of the Movement. Despite the small budget and lack of time, she quickly set up a dynamic team of young Congolese from Kinshasa and led them on this emotional experience.

The conflicts in the East of DRC and the critical situation in her country particularly concern her. At the beginning of the rebellion that brought down the former president Mobutu in 1997, she lived in Kisangani. She was only 8 years old when she fled violence with her family, narrowly escaping many times. Forever affected by the conflict that ravaged her country, this motivate her to help the movement to materialize SEMA in order to help deliver their message about the consequences of war on Congolese women.

She is currently working on a new upcoming film "Zairia".



## MAIN CAST



**Sandra BONVE** as  
Matumaini

Sandra BONVE spent all of her youth in Bukavu. When the casting for the film SEMA was launched by the Ekwa Macherie's team in Kinshasa to find the first two roles, Sandra Bonve was the first actress to try her luck. For Ekwa, she was perfect for the role. Her powerful acting inspired huge emotions from the whole team after the first seconds.

At age 33, Sandra BONVE is a single mother juggles who juggles several jobs. The talented Congolese would like to devote herself 100% to working as an actress, which is however not yet possible in DR Congo. Her outstanding performance in the SEMA film makes her one of the most promising Congolese actresses of her generation.

**Armande MAHABI** as  
Kimia

A member of the National Movement of the Survivors of DR Congo since 2017, Armande MAHABI is a Congolese student with a degree in financial management. While working with the women of the movement to write the script for SEMA, she did not think about playing a role in the movie. She was however, eager to help on set to support the organization.

When rehearsals began for the actors in Bukavu, the director Machérie EKWA noticed her and asked her to tryout for the second main role. Despite her very first experience in acting, she was particularly talented and brave to put herself in the skin of "Kimia", the young student who survived atrocities in the city of Bukavu.

Armande Mahabi fights alongside the Movement of Survivors for a Congo without rape and continues to pursue her studies at the University in Bukavu.



Many other survivors and volunteers played key roles on the cast and crew. Find out more on the credits page.

## LETTER FROM THE PRODUCER

"While we were planning to work on a documentary about our struggle and our work with women in the movement, Dr. Mukwege, whom we visit regularly for advice, suggested, rather, to make a fictional film.

The idea of finally being able to depict honestly what no documentary can show seemed to us to be the wisest choice. We need to help our fellow Congolese understand what we are living every day and how rape and stigmatization can destroy the victims of sexual violence. Our goal with the film is to create a powerful advocacy tool so that even in our most small remote villages, communities can understand why we need to break the silence about the atrocities we experience on a daily basis. And how the community's view of our children, often the product of rape, can cause further damage to Congolese society by creating a lasting heritage of stigma.

By partnering with director Macherie Ekwa, we thought as a 25-year-old Congolese woman, she was the ideal person, not only to do high-quality work, but above all to try to understand and turn our emotions into images.

The day we discovered the final product, we did not believe our eyes. It was impossible for us all to hold back our tears throughout the film's screening and even after.

We are proud of this beautiful film created both female and male survivors of the Movement, the exceptional technical team assembled by Macherie Ekwa, the non-survivor actresses and actors and the work of our colleagues of the Panzi Foundation, the Dr Denis Foundation Mukwege and the Panzi Hospital. Our struggles and efforts are now timeless. From now on, this film can be shown to the Congolese people and to the world as a piece of history which, we hope, will be part of the past as soon as possible.

Armed conflict which brings genocide and the use of rape as a weapon of war must stop. It is our dearest wish and today, it is our fiercest fight.

So that our children live in a better Congo, a Congo without rape, a Congo in peace,  
So that these rapists can no longer act with impunity without justice doing its job,  
So that all the victims of these atrocities can obtain reparations,

We unite as the National Movement of Survivors of the DRC and we encourage all our sisters and brothers to stand with us. "

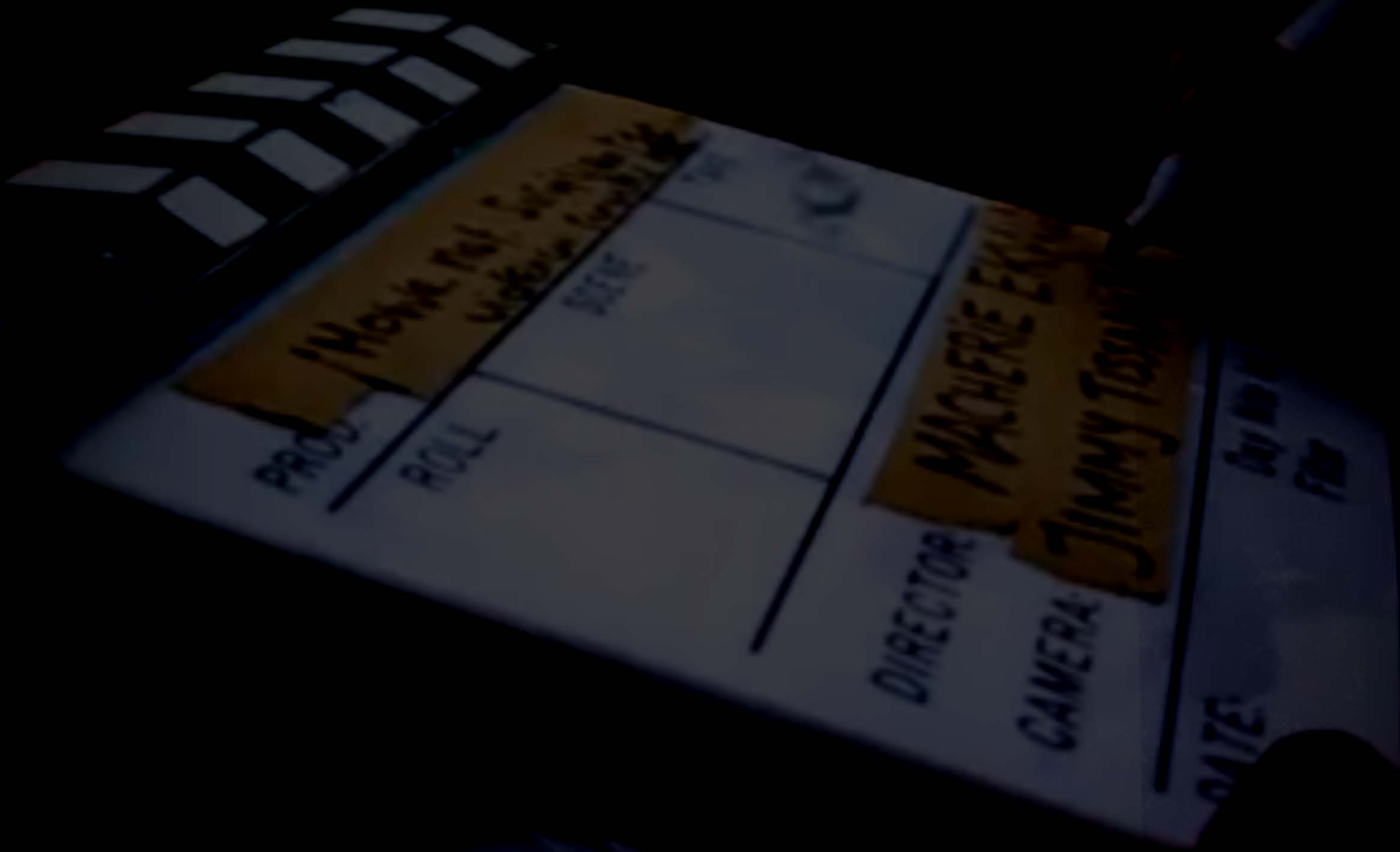
Tatiana Mukanire,  
National Coordinator of the Survivors Movement and Production Secretary of the SEMA film.



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## CREDITS





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## IMPORTANT RESOURCES

