

Testimonies from the Congo Free State

The Casement Report

"They had endured such ill-treatment at the hands of the Government officials and soldiers that nothing had remained but to be killed for failure to bring in rubber or to die in their attempts to satisfy the demands."

The Casement Report

"A widow came and declared that she had been forced to sell her daughter, a little girl about ten.... I found on returning that the statements made with regard to the girl were true.... The girl had again changed hands and was promised in sale to a town whose people are open cannibals."

The Casement Report

"Why do you catch the women and not the men?"

"If I caught the men who would work the rubber? But if I catch the wives...the rubber is brought in quickly."

The Casement Report

"At a village I touched at up the Lulunga River...the people complained that there was no rubber left in their district, and yet that the La Lulunga Company required of them each fortnight [every two weeks] a fixed quantity they could not supply. Three forest guards of that company were quartered, it was said, in this village, one of whom I found on duty, the two others, he informed me, having gone to Mampoka to convoy the fortnight's rubber. No livestock of any kind could be seen or purchased in this town, which had only a few years ago been a large and populous community, filled with people and well stocked with sheep, goats, ducks and fowls. Although I walked through most of it, I could only count ten men, with their families. There were said to be others in the part of the town I did not visit, but the entire community I saw were living in wretched houses and in visible distress."

The Casement Report

"The population of the lake-side towns would seem to have diminished within the last ten years by 60 or 70 percent. It was in 1893 that the effort to levy an india rubber imposition [tax] in this district was begun, and for some four or five years this imposition could only be collected at the cost of continual fighting. Finding the task of collecting india rubber a well-nigh impossible one, the authorities abandoned it in this district, and the remaining inhabitants now deliver a weekly supply of foodstuffs for the up-keep of the military camp at Irebu, of the big coffee plantation at Bikoro."

The Casement Report

"In the past they escaped in large numbers to the French territory, but many were prevented by force from doing this, and numbers were shot in the attempt."

A Congolese interviewed by Casement

"When the soldiers were sent to make us cut rubber there were so many killed we got tired of burying."

R.R., a Congolese interviewed by Casement

"I ran away with two old people, but they were caught and killed, and the soldiers made me carry the baskets holding their cut-off hands. They killed my little sister, threw her in a house, and set it on fire."

S.S., a Congolese interviewed by Casement

"I hid in a house with my little brother and sister. I heard guns fire. I took up my little sister and a big basket with native money in it, but had to leave the basket behind. My brother ran away. I tried to make my sister walk, but she was tired, and could not run through weakness. The soldiers took us, saying: 'We might keep them both. The little one is not bad looking.' But others said: 'No, we must kill the younger girl.' They put a knife through her stomach, left the body lying there. They also caught an old woman, cut her throat, divided her, ate her. They cut off the hands of those they had killed, and spread them out in a row

for the District Commissioner to see.... My mother was killed too."

A refugee from the rubber-producing regions, interviewed by Casement

"We had to go further and further into the forest to find the rubber vines, to go without food, and our women had to give up cultivating the fields and gardens. Then we starved. Wild beasts—leopards—killed some of us when we were working away in the forest, and others got lost or died from exposure and starvation, and we begged the white man to leave us alone, saying that we could get no more rubber, but the white men and their soldiers said: 'Go! You are only beasts yourselves.'"

U.U., a Congolese interviewed by Casement

"As we fled, the soldiers killed ten children, in the water. They killed a lot of adults, cut off their hands, put them in baskets, and took them to the white man, who counted 200 hands.... One day, soldiers struck a child with a gun-butt, cut off its head, and killed my sister and cut off her head, hands and feet because she had on rings."

Village headman to Reverend Harris, a British missionary

"Tell them [the rubber agents] that we cannot and therefore will not find rubber; we are willing to spend our strength at any work possible, but the rubber is finished. If we must either be massacred or bring rubber, well, let them kill us; then we suppose they will be satisfied."

Testimony by a Congolese given to Rev. A.E. Schrivener

"I myself saw a man at Likange who had had both his hands cut off. Sometimes they cut them at the wrist, sometimes farther up...with a machete. Also there was Muboma...who has a long scar across the back of his neck. There is another man called Botei at Inanga with the same sort of scar, where they wounded him maliciously, expecting him to die. They didn't cut his head off, they didn't get to the bone, but expected him to bleed to death. It was sheer cruelty; the State treated us abominably."

Chewema, a member of the Mahusi tribe

"I remember my mother, the people in our village, but have forgotten its name. When we were transported to Lukafu we were fastened together by a rope round our necks, and at night-time our hands and feet were tied together to prevent us from escaping. At Lukafu the elder women were forced at first by the soldiers to sleep in their huts until Commandant Kasiera prohibited this. At M'pwetu I witnessed the killing of two natives who had stolen rubber from the Government stores. By the order of the white man called Lutina, the two natives were beaten by his soldiers with a hippo-hide whip, after this they were made to stand up, the soldiers then threw bricks on them till they died. One native was from Chewerchewera's village, very near M'pwetu, and was buried by his relations; the other, who had no relations so near, was thrown into the Lake Mweru."

John and Johan, two African men recruited from British Central Africa to serve as soldiers during the construction of a telegraph line in the Congo Free State

"On our arrival in the Congo Free State we learnt from the inhabitants and the Government soldiers that there is always war between the white men, the soldiers and the natives. The reason of a war and the constant troubles are as follows:

"Long ago the Belgian officials hanged the soldiers for their bad behavior. They hanged so many that this created a vengeance to such an extent that all soldiers formed a ring under the headman...with the object to kill all officers at the different stations on or near the Lake Tanganyika. This they did and took all the guns and ammunition. They then formed a stockade and made Yankoffu their chief. Later on they were attacked by a strong force of the Belgians, also we under Mr. Mohun attacked them, we killed many people but could not get Yankoffu. Most of his people crossed the lake to German territory taking with them the captured guns and ammunition. After this other Belgian officers re-occupied the plundered stations, but from that time the officers became afraid of the soldiers. When we were there, one officer of Marabu station, about ten days

from Lake Tanganyika, thrashed a soldier with a hippo-hide whip. Sometime later the...soldier shot him dead. We...were given orders to catch the murderer, we went after him for many days but could not find him. The white men are so afraid of the soldiers that they let them do whatever they like, they rape, murder and steal everything of the inhabitants, and if the chief or villagers object they are often shot dead on the spot. The officers all know this, but they never take any notice of it as they are afraid to punish the soldiers."

Edward Bannister, British Vice-Consul for the Congo, on the complaints of British subjects serving in the Congo, 1894

"I had hundreds of complaints, and am still occupied with grave charges of cruelty practised on these men by officers of the State who stop short at nothing in brutality under the guise of discipline."

Leonard Arthur, British Vice-Consul for the Congo, 1896

"I have also ascertained, from a purely private source of information, that Captain Francqui was in the habit of sending out small parties of troops under a non-commissioned officer to the villages and neighborhoods for the purpose of demanding ivory and rubber. If these articles were not forthcoming, he would dispatch another armed party to attack the natives. On the return of the party the non-commissioned officer in charge would report that so many natives had been killed. This, however, would not satisfy Captain Francqui, who demanded proofs in the form of human hands that he number stated had been killed, and the armed part would again be sent out for this purpose, returning in due course with the right hands of the natives who had been killed, and having seized whatever ivory and india-rubber that could be found in the village."

W. Clayton Pickersgill, British Consul in the Congo

"A sentry on the Congo is a dare-devil aboriginal chosen from troops impressed outside the district in which he serves, for his loyalty and force of character. Armed with a rifle and pouch of cartridges he is located in a native village to see that the labour for which

its inhabitants are responsible is duly attended to. If they are india rubber collectors, his duty is to send the men into the forest and take note of those who do not return with the proper quantity. When food is the tax demanded, his business is to make sure that the women prepare and deliver it."

Robert Codrington, the Administrator of North Eastern Rhodesia

"When they could do so, the natives fled to the territories governed by other Powers. Monsieur de Lamotte, the Governor of the French Congo, said in his evidence before a Commission on Colonial Concessions held in Paris in 1900, '...the agents of the Abir [one of the great rubber companies] have used their powers to such effect that they have succeeded in inducing 30,000 natives to leave their territory and take refuge on the French bank of the Congo.'"

Rev. Whitehead, a missionary at Lukolela, interviewed by Casement

"Their chiefs are being weakened in their prestige and physique through imprisonment, which is often cruel, and thus weakened in their authority over their own people, they are put into chains for the shortage of manioc bread."

Edvard Sjöblom, a Swedish missionary

"They often kill the Congolese for the sake of rubber. Once, a soldier, pointing to a basket, said to me: 'look, only two hands! That's nothing. A few days ago I brought the white man 160 hands and they were thrown in the river.' As he spoke I saw the horrible sight of dead bodies hanging down from the branches into the water."

John Weeks, a British missionary

"Last week I returned from spending eight days in the Bokongo, Bongondo and other towns below this, our station at Monsembe, and while there I learned of the killing by Mabata [the native name of a Belgian officer] and his soldiers of twenty-two men and women. And what was the crime of which these unfortunate folk were guilty? They were behind in

their taxes, and owed the State between them a few goats.”

John Weeks, a British missionary

“The cutting off of hands, I do not know from whom the order emanates. But this I know. There are victims who have survived the cruelty in every district, in some more than others. I know White men who have seen the baskets of hands being carried to the central State Station and others have told me of the hands being put in a line or lines. State soldiers themselves give as their reasons for this barbarous deed that ‘...they have to account for the use of the cartridges in this way.’”

Mr. William Morrison, from the American Baptist Mission

“Mr. Sheppard (an American missionary) saw along the way several burnt villages, also some wounded persons. He reached the well-arranged stockade, and was received in a friendly way by Mlumba Nkusa and his 500 or more followers. Inside the stockade Mr. Sheppard counted eighty-one human hands slowly drying over a fire. Outside the stockade he counted more than two score bodies piled in a heap.... Mr. Sheppard also saw several Albinis rifles and a pistol, with cartridges—all of which natives are forbidden to have. Mlumba Nkasa said plainly that he had been sent by the State officer at Luluaburg, and that he had already dispatched him sixteen slaves.”

Mr. William Morrison, from the American Baptist Mission

“During the months of June, July and August of last year we had at Luebo...another reign of terror. A new officer, named Deschamps, had just come into power at Luluaburg. During my absence he came to Luebo, and there, without a warning to the chiefs or villagers, sent out his soldiers to catch men by force wherever they could be found. The people fled at once to the forest for safety.... I made a complaint to the authorities about the matter and demanded protection for the natives and urged that none be taken by force.

This Monsieur Duces promised...within

a few days, however, he received imperative orders from his chief, Deschamps. Consequently he began catching the people by force. They fled to the forests for safety...the soldiers scoured the woods in search of men. They succeeded in catching about eighteen or twenty, and these I saw taken away under guard, tied about the neck with ropes.

This whole affair I reported to the Native Protection Commission appointed by the King some years ago...asking it to see that the natives were protected in their rights. The only answer I received was that the State established forced labor by law, and that doubtless the officers were acting entirely within their powers.”

Mrs. Banks, a missionary

“[I] saw a native sentry beating and loudly abusing a poor woman who was crossing the station with a basket on her back. On investigating the cause of the disturbance [I] found that the basket was full of hands which had been cut off in one of the rubber palaver, and that instead of nineteen hands only eighteen could be found, the woman having dropped one en route. [I] counted the smoked hands, and found some of them to belong to children, others to women, and to men. Many of the victims were relations of the poor creature who was bearing the basket to the local agent.”

An anonymous missionary explaining why he would not speak out

“I am not afraid of what the State may do to me personally, but I fear that some officers might try and worry me through the people with whom I work—hence my reticence in appealing in any of these matters.”

Mr. Yule, a missionary

“In the daytime they (the women) do all the usual station work, such as carrying water for the Government officials, cleaning their rooms, etc., etc., and during the night they are obliged to be at the disposal of the soldiers. The soldier must live with the woman as long as he is at the station; should he be removed, the woman must remain at the station whether