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November 20, 2015

Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), we thank you for your attention to and concerns about the growing unrest in Burundi. We are writing to offer support for your efforts to encourage peace during this challenging time and to share with you our on-the-ground insights in the hopes that it will bolster your work.

Catholic Relief Services has been working in Burundi since 1961 providing humanitarian relief and development assistance to those in need. When war broke out in 1993, CRS played a strong leadership role in addressing the emergency needs of those displaced by the conflict. The signing of the Arusha Accords in 2000 and democratic elections in 2005 and 2010 brought a period of sustained peace, and it was during this time that CRS and our partners transitioned from emergency response to post-conflict recovery and development. Recent political developments in Burundi have brought back the violence, and fear that we all had hoped was gone forever. Sadly, the deteriorating security situation in the country has resulted in mass displacement and tremendous loss of human life, and we are gravely concerned for the safety and welfare of the Burundian people.

We are dismayed by the increasing violence and inflammatory rhetoric that is being used and are calling on all actors to de-escalate their responses. We support the Catholic Church in Burundi in its call to encourage peace and mediated dialogue between the Government of Burundi and those engaged in democratic opposition, including members of the non-violent Opposition that have fled the country. While we appreciate the efforts of the Government of Burundi to establish an Inter-Burundian Dialogue Process, true security and lasting peace for Burundi will only come with an inclusive, externally-mediated dialogue that engages all parties who support a peaceful resolution to the current political crisis. We ask for your partnership on this effort and specifically for your support for the following:

- 1) Ensuring better coordination and communication among the U.S. government, the European Union, the United Nations and the African Union regarding the current situation to provide the best outcome possible for the Burundian people.
- 2) Work with the international partners above to pressure all parties to stop the violence and ensure the respect for all civil rights.
- 3) Ensuring that Burundians access accurate, unbiased information on the current situation by supporting independent media outlets, including Voice of America.
- 4) Ensuring the presence of human rights observers in Bujumbura and providing them freedom of movement to effectively monitor.

Letter to Secretary of State Kerry

November 20, 2015

Page 2

In addition to the importance of diplomatic efforts to peacefully resolve the growing crisis in Burundi, we urge increased attention to the worsening humanitarian situation in Burundi and surrounding countries hosting Burundian refugees. We ask for your leadership in the following areas:

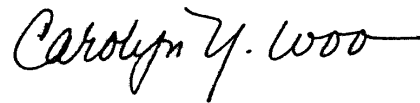
- 1) Ensuring that those affected by the current crisis can receive the assistance they urgently need through increased technical and financial support for development and humanitarian assistance programs.
- 2) Encouraging increased United States engagement in coordination and contingency planning efforts on the ground in Burundi. We are concerned about both the limited coordination and planning between the U.S. departments responsible for humanitarian assistance in Burundi and the United Nations and the limited presence of U.S. government staff on the ground.
- 3) Urging commitment by international donors to fund the humanitarian response activities currently being planned by the United Nations and international NGOs should a large-scale response become necessary.
- 4) Directing that U.S. government humanitarian response departments initiate funding requests and coordination activities immediately in order to ensure there is no lag in response in the event of a large-scale humanitarian disaster in Burundi.

Again, we appreciate your attention and interest in defusing the situation in Burundi and we stand ready to work alongside you and the Burundian people to achieve a real and lasting peace.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace



Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo
President
Catholic Relief Services