



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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October 7, 2013

Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. State Department
2201 C. Street
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, I visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo in each of the last two years and met with Bishop Nicolas Lola Djomo, President of the Bishops' Conference of the Congo, and his staff to discuss the situation in the Congo. As a follow up to our discussions, enclosed you will find a letter from Bishop Djomo. I would like to join him in expressing appreciation for the appointment of Mr. Russell Feingold as the new United States Special Representative for the African Great Lakes region and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Since the beginning of the crisis in the region, our two conferences of bishops have collaborated to bring peace to Congo. Together with Catholic Relief Services, our Conference has hosted numerous delegations from the Congo to the United States to engage the State Department, the National Security Council, and members of Congress. As Bishop Djomo mentioned, we worked with former Senators Feingold and Brownback to craft the Congo Conflict Minerals Act. Since then we have worked with the Securities and Exchange Commission to ensure that the regulations to implement the law were as rigorous as possible. This continues to be a high priority for the Bishops' Conference.

Last June, Bishop Djomo, accompanied by USCCB and CRS staff, met with Acting Assistant Secretary of State Donald Yamamoto and his senior staff to discuss priority strategies to bring peace to the Congo and the region at large.

I support the priority issues as laid out in Bishop Djomo's letter to you and urge you to give them due consideration. I want to assure you and Mr. Feingold of our strong support for his mission.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Enclosure



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2201 C. Street
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Dear Secretary Kerry:

I am writing to express my appreciation for the appointment of The Honorable Russell Feingold as the new United States Special Representative for the African Great Lakes region and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I had a chance to work with Mr. Feingold's office when he was Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs. He and former Senator Sam Brownback collaborated with us on what became the Congo Conflict Minerals Act. As you are aware, the Act was attached to the Dodd-Frank Financial Reform and Consumer Protection Act as Section 1502, passed into law, and is now being enforced with positive effects. This experience of success leads me to hope and pray that his record of support to the people of the Great Lakes will continue to bear fruit.

As Special Representative Feingold takes up his responsibilities, I believe there are five immediate priorities that deserve his attention. We kindly request that he work with the UN Special Envoy Mary Robinson and the donor community to:

1. Help stop the fighting in eastern Congo by supporting the new Intervention Brigade to neutralize the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the M23 militia, and other armed groups in eastern DRC, while at the same time protecting civilians from harm in its operations;
2. Continue to engage the regional governments in stability and peace efforts, especially Rwanda, including ending support for M23;
3. Encourage both developed and regional countries and private companies, which conduct mining activities in the Congo, to follow U.S. and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) regulations and standards to end the illegal trade in conflict minerals, cutting off funding to the armed groups in eastern DRC;
4. Help ensure provincial and local elections that are free and fair, decentralizing power and giving local leaders more authority and resources to provide services and resolve local disputes that are exploited by various armed groups seeking recruits; and

5. Support additional long-term grassroots peacebuilding efforts to address local conflicts over land, identity, and power. This layer of the conflict in the east gets little attention. If not addressed, military operations and efforts at state building and regional stabilization cannot ensure a sustainable peace.

If these strategies succeed, the fighting will subside, the armed groups will be deprived of resources, the illegal mining and suffering it causes will end, and local leaders will be empowered to journey down the long road to sustainable peace. This foundation will allow many other national issues, such as security sector reform, improved governance and electoral reform, to stand a better chance of succeeding.

My last request is to encourage the international community to work proactively with the Church and civil society. For too long, a powerful central government and large international corporations have operated in isolation from civil society. These conditions breed corruption, patronage, and governmental monopolization of power. These same conditions exclude civil society and undermine a free press, both of which could help promote transparency and accountability.

The Catholic Church and the other faith communities have an extensive network of institutions that are trusted by and accountable to the people they serve. The Catholic Church reaches to the far corners of the country. In many places it is the only organization that provides health and education. Our National Peace and Justice Commission organized country-wide electoral education programs and deployed 30,000 electoral monitors during the 2011 elections. The Church also operates an Episcopal Commission on Natural Resources with 20 observation posts throughout eastern Congo. These institutions are more recent additions to the health and education structures that we have operated for decades. Our agencies serve poor persons and communities with support from many Catholic Church donors, such as Catholic Relief Services. We also have a close partnership with the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

I encourage you to work with the Church and other faith communities to build a strong civil society, the third and vital leg in a vibrant and free society.

I welcome Special Representative Feingold to the Congo and am ready to gather Church leaders and my brothers and sisters from the other faith communities to meet with him in order to build a new strategic partnership. Please be assured of my support and prayers for the success of Mr. Feingold's mission.

Sincerely yours,




Most Reverend Nicolas Lola Djomo
Bishop of Tshumbe
President, National Episcopal Conference of the Congo