



## *Committee on International Justice and Peace*

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November 25, 2008

Senator Russell D. Feingold  
United States Senate

Senator Sam Brownback  
United States Senate

Dear Senators Feingold and Brownback:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is following the tragic events in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with concern and sadness. We were grateful for your letters to President Paul Kagame (October 20, 2008) and President Joseph Kabila (November 3, 2008). We support your effort to influence the various parties to the conflict to call for a halt to the heated rhetoric and fighting.

We are in contact with the National Bishops' Conference of the Congo and have received two of their recent statements: "More Innocent Blood in the DR Congo," October 13, 2008, and "The DR Congo Cries for its Children – We are Inconsolable," November 13, 2008. Copies in French are attached for your reference.

The bishops of the DRC place the exploitation of the country's natural resources at the very center of the fighting. The mineral trade that passes through neighboring countries fuels the small arms trade and the fighting. They note that the violence and the suffering occur near sites where armed forces establish mines to extract natural resources. As the militias defend these sites, they "balkanize" Eastern DRC into mini-states where there is no rule of law and militias act with impunity. The bishops decry a particularly cruel violence that plagues these areas, especially the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war.

The National Bishops' Conference of the Congo has called on the international community to increase humanitarian assistance to the many people who have lost their livelihoods and moved to camps to escape the fighting. They implore donor nations to do everything they can to restore respect for international law. They urge placement of pacification and stabilization forces to restore the respect for human rights to their country.

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has also called on people of good will to work for a peaceful solution and for increased aid to the displaced. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops echoes these calls and the concerns of the Universal Church.

The Conference has taken note of State Department efforts to promote dialogue and negotiations between the actors in the Congo and those in the region, especially Rwanda. We are encouraged by Assistant Secretary of State Jendayi Frazer's visit to the region and her participation in the meeting of regional leaders that occurred in Nairobi earlier this month. We are also aware of the ongoing work of Special Envoy Mr. Tim Shortley. We support these efforts.

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Despite these efforts the death and destruction in eastern Congo continues with terrible consequences for the Congolese people. If the conflict is not addressed in a sustainable way, it could again destabilize the entire sub-region.

A delegation from the Catholic Church in the DRC will visit Washington during the first week of December. Our Conference hopes to facilitate meetings on the Hill. Given your evident concern for the intense suffering in the eastern DRC, I hope you will consider meeting with them.

In gratitude for your continued efforts to help address the conflict in eastern DRC, I am

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Howard J. Hubbard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard  
Bishop of Albany  
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace