



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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November 25, 2008

The Honorable Dr. Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

BY FAX: 202- 647-2283

Dear Secretary Rice:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is following the tragic events in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with concern and sadness. 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, neither the Nairobi accord nor the AMANI agreements are being respected and seemingly there has been little U.S. presence in the region since those agreements. As a result, death and destruction in eastern Congo continue with terrible consequences for the Congolese people. The recent U.N. approval of 3,000 additional troops is encouraging, but MONUC must become a credible and effective deterrent force if it is to live up to its Chapter 7 mandate to protect civilians and put an end to the violence. This is a conflict that, if not addressed in a sustainable way, could destabilize again the entire sub-region. We ask that you redouble your efforts to keep an effective U.S. government presence on the ground to reinvigorate the Tripartite Plus talks to address the root causes of this long running tragedy.

A delegation from the Catholic Church in the DRC will visit Washington during the first week of December. Our Conference hopes to facilitate meetings with State Department staff. I hope your staff 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 cursive script, reading "Howard J. Hubbard".

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