



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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February 24, 2017

Most Reverend Marcel Utambi Tapa, Archbishop of Kisangani
President, Congo Catholic Bishops' Conference (CENCO)
CENCO General Secretariat
Kinshasa-Gombé
Democratic Republic of the Congo

Your Excellency:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, I write to renew our expression of solidarity and concern in light of the recent outbreak of violence against the Catholic Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We continue to follow CENCO's mediation efforts towards a political agreement that would lead to a transitional government and an electoral calendar. We are heartened by the Saint Sylvestre agreement that you helped negotiate. This represents a significant breakthrough. It is also encouraging that the parties continued to make progress even if the process is now suspended following the untimely death of Mr. Etienne Tchisekedi. May his soul rest in peace.

We understand that the suspension of talks has led to rising tensions and an outbreak of violence, some of which targeted Catholic churches. I support the call of His Eminence Laurent Cardinal Monsengwo Pasinya to the country's political leaders to show humility, wisdom and the democratic spirit in order to move past their self-centered concerns and resolve the remaining issues that threaten the peace and security of the entire nation.

In my solidarity visit with Bishop Fridolin Ambongo and Abbé Donatien Nshole last October, I offered our continued support to your efforts to promote an inclusive dialogue. I invite your thoughts on how our Conference can support CENCO at this challenging time. We stand ready to assist you in any way we can within the limits of our resources. We are open to your ideas and recommendations regarding how the United States Government can play a constructive role in the crisis.

May you find solace in the Lord's words in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt 5:11-12). May God grant you continued courage, wisdom and humility as you struggle to keep the spirit of dialogue and peace alive in the Congo. You and the people of the Congo remain in my prayers.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

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

Cc: Bishop Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, Vice President, CENCO
Abbé Donatien Nsholé, Executive Secretary, CENCO