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December 17, 2009

Rep. Jim McDermott
Rep. Frank Wolf

Rep. Barney Frank
Rep. Donald Payne

Dear Representatives:

We write to express support for your bipartisan initiative, the Conflict Minerals Trade Act (H.R. 4128). This bill represents an important start and an opportunity to improve the lives of millions of people in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by requiring the U.S. government to focus greater attention on the causes of the deadly conflict and the resulting dire humanitarian situation. The bill could help significantly reduce the levels of violence in the eastern DRC.

USCCB recently received a letter from the National Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Democratic Republic of Congo (known by its French acronym CENCO) seeking our support for legislative initiatives to "fight against the illegal exploitation of natural resources" in the DRC. As Bishop Nicolas Djomo Lola, Bishop of Tshumbe and President of CENCO, wrote:

For more than 10 years, CENCO has not ceased to point out in its statements and messages the relationship between the wars and recurring conflicts in the DR Congo and the illegal exploitation of natural resources. Likewise, it has always called for the various summits for peace, especially in the Eastern DRC, to address the root causes of these wars and conflicts, and not only their effects, in particular the widespread violations of human rights, rapes and sexual violence used as weapons of war, as well as corruption. ... It is necessary to highlight that the exploitation of natural resources is one of the causes, if not the main cause, of tragedy in Eastern Congo....

Recognizing the complex nature of the conflict in the eastern DRC and the Great Lakes region and out of solidarity with the Church in the DRC, we call on Congress and the Administration to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to support a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This strategy should include denial of entry into the United States of goods that contain metals from facilities that have been audited and certified as "conflict mineral facilities." We ask Congress to improve H.R. 4128 as it moves forward to include a sense of Congress that the U.S. State Department should expand its efforts to support a peaceful resolution of the conflict and to strengthen local and U.S. agencies providing development assistance and humanitarian aid to those suffering from this tragedy in the eastern region of the DRC.

Along with the Church and our partners in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we thank you for your commitment to peace and development in that violence-torn country.

Sincerely yours,

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

Ken Hackett
President
Catholic Relief Services