



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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November 25, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C Street
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to express my encouragement on the reported decision of the M23 militia to lay down their arms. The cessation of hostilities will certainly go a long way toward reducing untold suffering in eastern DRC.

This accomplishment is due to the successful implementation of policies our Committee has supported for many years. Although the DRC Armed Forces have been accused of human rights violations, in this operation against the M23, the army is reported to have acted efficiently and in line with the training that the donor nations have provided. The new UN Intervention Brigade has built a better reputation for more robust enforcement of peace and seems to have worked well in backing up the DRC Armed Forces. There are widespread reports that you and British Foreign Minister William Hague called President Paul Kagame of Rwanda to urge him to keep Rwandan forces and support out of the conflict.

The Church maintains a strong preference for negotiated settlements. The people of eastern Congo have suffered too long from the consequences of a breakdown of the rule of law. There have been repeated attacks on civilians, displacements, loss of livelihoods and countless deaths. An end to M23 hostilities is a positive development. To consolidate this accomplishment, many issues need to be resolved. Will M23 commanders, accused of war crimes or crimes against humanity, be brought to justice? Will former low-level militia members be integrated into society with justice and mercy? Will the various ethnic communities reject violent retribution and over the long term rebuild right relations? Will neighboring countries continue to withhold support to other militia groups in eastern DRC?

By many accounts there are upwards of forty other active militias in eastern DRC. Can the same combination of offers of peace talks, a well-trained DRC army acting justly, a UN Intervention Brigade robustly supporting the national army, and strong donor country leadership lead these armed groups, in particular the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), to end hostilities across the two Kivu provinces?

To build a sustainable peace, will the DRC Government and the donor community promote a decentralization of power and resources to the people of eastern DRC so they can establish the rule of law, provide administrative leadership in their communities, and rebuild the social services infrastructure, especially schools and health clinics? Can the DRC government and the Regional Conference of the Great Lakes end the illegal mining and export of minerals from the

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DRC that fuel the militia, and instead invest the revenue in the wellbeing of the people in the DRC? It is our hope that the apparent end of the M23 threat is a sustainable development that leads to a further reduction in armed violence in eastern DRC and also in Katanga to the south. We are encouraged by the role that the United States Government is reported to have played in making that happen.

We urge our nation to maintain robust engagement in Eastern Congo and the Great Lakes Region. We know that humanitarian needs will persist. Over the long term, the region must rebuild its infrastructure and a vibrant economy, and restore social and communal relations through peacebuilding programs. The United States should lead the donor community in helping to ensure that these needs are met. Catholic Relief Services (CRS), an agency of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has worked in the DRC for decades on programs that fill many of these needs. We urge you to take full advantage of their experience and extensive network of partners, including Catholic institutions which are present in even the most remote communities and often the only working institutions available.

The Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stands ready to support our nation's efforts to help build peace and prosperity in the Congo.

Sincerely yours,

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

cc: Ambassador Russell D. Feingold, U.S. Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo