



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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October 24, 2008

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

Dear Secretary Rice:

The terrible act of piracy against the Master Vessel Faina off the coast of Somalia in the Red Sea is a vivid sign of the conflicts and lawlessness that plague the region. The Catholic Church's commitment to human life, human dignity and human rights requires the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to once again call attention to the volatile situation in the Greater Horn of Africa and the need for greater U.S. leadership.

The fact that Somali boatmen can operate with impunity and have hijacked dozens of ships is an indicator of the anarchy and chaos that grips Somalia. The human suffering in Somalia continues to devastate lives and communities after years of fighting, drought and an absence of the rule of law and government services.

As you are undoubtedly aware, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that up to one million Somali civilians have fled their homes and 8,000 have been killed in the wake of the entry of Ethiopian forces in early 2007. Since the civil war started in 1991 upwards of one million people have died. Although peace talks among the warring factions have occurred, the fighting continues on a daily basis in many parts of the country.

The military armaments on board the MV Faina raise additional serious questions. Many sources indicate that they may have been destined for South Sudan. If true, this is another sign that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Khartoum Government and the Government of South Sudan is unstable and in danger of unraveling. The implementation of the CPA is uneven and faltering. A renewal of armed conflict would destroy the future for Sudan and would take a heavy toll on lives and livelihoods. The failure to forge a durable peace between north and south would also have dire implications for resolving the conflict in the west and could well prolong and deepen the suffering of the people of Darfur.

Our Conference has supported your efforts to work with the international community to support the CPA. Ambassador Richard Williamson, the President's Special Envoy to Sudan, has presented detailed accounts of the difficult and often discouraging political situation on the ground. Despite these efforts, it is clear that the movement towards peace is

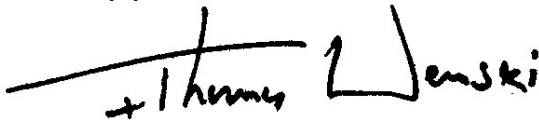
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unsatisfactory and does not inspire confidence for the future. We urge the State Department to keep Ambassador Williamson engaged with all parties to both the CPA and the conflict in Darfur conflict and to make conflict in the Greater Horn of Africa a top tier issue as you prepare for the transition to a new administration.

The very real and daily assault on basic human security and on the dignity of life in Somalia and Sudan must be addressed by the U.S. Government. The lives of Somalis and Sudanese hang in the balance. We cannot allow these urgent situations to be neglected due to political transitions in the United States or the failures of regional political leaders.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops continues to support you in working for peace in the Greater Horn of Africa. Praying for peace with justice for the people of the region, I remain

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T" and a distinct "W".

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace