

January 21, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister :

In view of the upcoming resumption of the parliamentary session, we would like to remind the government of the expectations of the populations of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with respect to Canada. These were expressed by the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) delegation during a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Lawrence Cannon, on December 2, 2008.

As you know, the province of North-Kivu in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has once again been the scene of violent confrontations between the DRC armed forces and the Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP), a rebel movement headed by Laurent Nkunda.

Since the end of August, more than 250,000 people have been forced to flee their homes for displaced persons' camps that offer little safety, or have taken refuge in forests out of reach of humanitarian aid. This brings to more than one million the number of displaced persons in North-Kivu province alone. This is the latest of the periods of violence in this region which began with the arrival of Rwandan refugees in eastern DRC in 1994, and which continued with the war that began in 1996. It is a glaring example of massive violations of fundamental human rights, which have been denounced by numerous reports and eye-witness accounts: war crimes, extra-judicial assassinations, widespread rape, forced enlistment of children and so on. Once again, the fraudulent control of mineral resources can be pointed to as the main cause of the conflict, as confirmed by the UN Security Council Expert Group in their investigation into the financing of arms and weapons circulating in the region.

Mr Prime Minister, this situation where one humanitarian crisis follows another in eastern DRC has lasted for more than 14 years and must end. Canada must argue forcefully for more effective intervention from the international community in order to deal once and for all with the problems that lie behind these repeated humanitarian tragedies.

The renewed fighting is all the more intolerable given that it occurs two years after elections that were recognized as legitimate and democratic by the Congolese people and the international community, and after a series of regional and national talks aimed at re-establishing peace and security. These initiatives led to the signing of solemn accords by all those involved in the conflict: *Pact on Security, Stability and Development in Africa's Great Lakes Region* (December 2006); the Nairobi Joint Declaration (November 2007); *L'acte d'engagement* [between the DRC government and the Congolese armed groups, committing themselves to the cessation of all acts of violence] from the Goma Conference (January 2008). Canada, as a member of the *International Committee to Support Transition* (CIAT) from 2003 to 2006, as co-Chair of *Friends of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region* from 2003 to 2007, and as an international witness to the signing of *l'Acte d'engagement* in Goma, actively supported these undertakings and is a guarantor for their implementation.

The inhumane fate of the displaced people, the declared inability of the UN mission to Congo (MONUC) to protect civilians from ongoing persecution, the involvement of foreign countries in the present conflict and the continuing threat posed by the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) on Congolese soil demands urgent, determined and coordinated actions from the international community. Canada cannot back away from its responsibility to protect the Congolese people.

Following the indecision of the European Union with respect to the call from the UN Secretary-General to dispatch an emergency mission to Goma, the UN Security Council, the African Union, the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region and the African countries in the region once again undertook a series of initiatives aimed at establishing a new cease-fire and at solving the problem of the FDLR presence in the Kivu provinces. Whilst hoping that these efforts will be successful, it is feared that without a more determined effort on the part of the international community to tackle the main causes of the crisis, the current lull constitutes only an interlude similar to the preceding ones.

Mr Prime Minister, the signatory organizations and individuals ask your government to respond positively to the expectations of the Congolese people.

Canada must:

- Accede to the request of the Security Council to reinforce MONUC;
- Provide emergency humanitarian aid to handle current needs;
- Work to ensure that individuals responsible for the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the region are charged and brought to trial in fair proceedings before the International Criminal Court and national level courts, including in Canada, as appropriate;
- Bolster the Canadian programme to help victims of sexual violence, with emphasis on community involvement as recommended by Congolese women's organizations in the region;
- Provide financial support to the Amani programme, instituted after the Goma Conference, in the form of support for economic and social reconstruction in the Kivu regions to offer local communities the opportunity to extricate themselves from misery and reduce their vulnerability to armed groups and traffickers;
- Require that companies based in Canada obtain the assurance that the minerals used in their products do not come from the Kivu areas controlled by illegal armed groups and are not marketed internationally by companies and individuals identified by the UN Expert Panel on the violations of the arms embargo in the DRC.

Yours sincerely,

Signatory organizations and individuals :

Alternatives
Amnistie internationale Canada francophone
Antennes de paix
Canadiens pour les droits humains au Congo (CDHC)
Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)
Centre de coopération internationale en santé et développement (CCISD)
Civilian Peace Service Canada
The United Church of Canada
Groupe Justice et Libération
Partnership Africa Canada

Amnesty International Canada
Les Amitiés Canada-Rwanda
International Bureau for Children's Rights
Canadian Federation of University Women

CARE Canada
Centre canadien d'étude et de coopération internationale (CECI)
Development and Peace
L'Entraide missionnaire
Jeunesse du Monde
Terre sans frontières

As well as :

David Lord, Peacebuild – Paix durable
Carlene Dempster
Lara Olson, Center for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary

Gerry Caplan
Me Catherine Morris

C.C. Mr Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
Monsieur Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Mr Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party