

Howard Wolpe
U.S. Special Adviser to the Great Lakes
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

March 23, 2010

Dear Mr. Wolpe:

We write to express our sincere appreciation for your demonstrated commitment to Africa, particularly the Great Lakes Region. With the advent of a new administration and your appointment as Special Adviser, it is our hope that the United States will reevaluate its policy towards the countries of the region.

We would like to request a meeting with you to discuss the priorities of the Great Lakes Special Envoy's office and to offer our perspective.

As you are well aware, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the surrounding region have endured a cycle of violence resulting in the death and displacement of many people, especially Congolese. We applaud your attention to the horrifying level of **violence against women and girls** in the east – a level of brutality which adds another element of desperation to an already alarming humanitarian situation.

This conflict is indeed a complex one that requires a comprehensive approach to ensure a sustainable peace. In our view the fundamental problem is the long-term lack of effective governance within Congo, which has led to a deeply-entrenched culture of impunity.

Further, our policy recommendations address underlying factors that perpetuate the conflict, rather than treating symptoms of the violence. It is our belief that these root causes are profoundly lodged in the historical, social, and ethnic complexities in every country located in the Great Lakes Region. For example, the Rwandan government's reluctance to dialogue with Rwandan armed groups currently operating in Eastern Congo acts as a stumbling block to their repatriation and condemns eastern Congo to ongoing conflict, pillage, rape, and displacement. **Regional governments must be held accountable** for their destabilizing involvement in Eastern Congo.

We hope that your regional mandate and focus will incite and encourage **sustained and comprehensive regional diplomacy that engages all parties**. Until this rigorous diplomacy is enacted and military initiatives are abandoned, true peace and stability in the Great Lakes region will remain elusive.

To end the conflict, the social, administrative and judicial structures of the Congolese government must be empowered and strengthened. Comprehensive **security sector reform** is vital to ensuring stability and demanding accountability. It is also urgent to establish frameworks for broader dialogue, including African and U.S. civil society, legislators, and other relevant government sectors rather than to privilege expanding military ties through AFRICOM.

We urge the United States government to **require transparency of all US based corporations that are active within the Eastern Congo conflict zone**. Their involvement too often further entrenches an economy that is based on a cycle of violence perpetuated by the expropriation of Congolese national resources. The United States should encourage the Congolese government to better regulate trade routes and provide better oversight to ensure that human rights are upheld and revenue from the minerals benefits the Congolese people as a whole rather than foreign corporate interests.

Finally, as Congo approaches **national elections in 2011** and struggles with instability in the East, it is vital for the United States to leverage its considerable political power to promote fair elections, security, and economic well being for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to express these recommendations and concerns. We appreciate your continued efforts to bring peace to the region and look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Africa Action
Africa Faith and Justice Network
African Security Research Project
Association of Concerned African Scholars
Congo Global Action
Foreign Policy in Focus
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Friends of the Congo
Global Ministries of United Church of Christ and Christian Church
Great Lakes Restoration
Jewish World Watch

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Research Center on Environment, Democracy, and Human Rights
Shitowa Foundation
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

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