

c/o AIDD Women Peace & Security Congo Project

19 Benham Court, Kings Esplanade, Hove, BN3 2WR
email: info@acronym.org.uk

Rt. Hon. Rishi Sunak MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

25 November 2022

Cc: Rt. Hon. James Cleverly, Foreign Secretary

Request for Meeting to address UK Involvement and Discuss Ways to Prevent International Crimes and Violence in D.R.Congo

Dear Prime Minister,

Recalling the importance of UN Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1889 (2009) on Women, Peace and Security, the undersigned groups support the enclosed 31 October 2022 "Memorandum of Diaspora Congolese women denouncing international crimes committed in the D.R.Congo and the wars that are dehumanising local populations".

With this letter we also call on the UK government to set up an urgent meeting for COMMON CAUSE UK's delegation of women from the African Great Lakes Region to meet with you as Prime Minister, and relevant members of your government, to discuss what needs to be done to stop the cycle of human insecurity, carnage and crimes that are being committed with complicity by some UK companies in D.R.Congo.

As detailed in the COMMON CAUSE UK memorandum and its references, the threats and dangers for unarmed Congolese civilians, especially women and children, have become even more critical. On 29th October 2022, the towns of Kiwanja, Bunagana, Rutchuru and Rumangabo in Eastern D.R.Congo fell into the hands of the vicious armed group M23, resulting in many rapes and killings, and massive displacement of the population towards the already fragile city of Goma where they are living in inhumane conditions. These horrific developments demand urgent attention and action by the UK government and UN Security Council.

The UK government profits directly and indirectly from businesses, incomes and taxes derived from activities in D.R.Congo and the East African Great Lakes Region that are carried out by multinational corporations and armed groups that are engaging in exploitative mining, armed conflicts, and illegal trading in arms, precious minerals and natural resources, in breach of OECD guidelines and International Humanitarian Law. These crimes, which include murder, rape, sexual exploitation, trafficking and abuse against women and girls, continue to be carried out with apparent impunity.

It is in the considered interests of the UK and the World that these horrendous human rights violations be stopped. With 60 percent of the Congo Basin Forest, the DRC is one of the lungs of the world. It is also the main producer of critical minerals needed for the much-needed energy transition, including 70 percent of the world production of cobalt and sizeable shares of cobalt, lithium, and zinc. Instability in the DRC, therefore, threatens global efforts to tackle the climate destruction.

The 1990-94 Rwandan civil wars and massacres caused a humanitarian catastrophe for Eastern D.R.Congo, including through the UN's Operation Turquoise of 1994. From then, Congolese civilians became targeted and traumatised by decades of armed conflicts, violence, mass killings, rape and sexual abuse. These crimes against civilians – especially women – continue today, amounting to genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression and sexual violence, as recognised by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998 and brought into force in 2002.

Armed violence has now become the easiest route to power and wealth in the Great Lakes region. The key regional institutions such as the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC), and the Economic Community of Central African States

(ECCAS/CEEAC) appear powerless to stop the violence or address illegal and oppressive actions carried out on behalf of military regimes in Rwanda, Uganda and D.R.Congo. Major reasons for failures to find legal and diplomatic solutions are the corrupt and exploitative behaviour of military-industrial multinationals that pursue profits at the expense of human security and local people.

The UN Peacekeeping missions (MONUC/MONUSCO), established in the D.R.Congo since 1999, have failed to protect Congolese women and other civilians over the past 23 years. Instead of helping, these UN missions have become part of the problem, contributing to the predatory behaviours and dangers that continue to threaten Congolese women and girls, causing untold misery.

These violent attacks bear many similarities to earlier attacks conducted in 2008, which were committed by the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) and ADF (Allied Defence Forces). These were reported by UN experts as backed by Rwandan and Ugandan Governments as well as militias armed with foreign weapons. UK companies as well as arms traders from the USA, Russia, China and various European countries have been implicated and bear responsibility. An estimated 120 armed groups are reportedly active in eastern Congo now, with many funded directly or indirectly by multinational corporations and traffickers that are illegally trading in natural resources, small arms and light weapons (SALW).

We write in support of COMMON CAUSE in the UK, D.R.Congo and Great Lakes region, and their work to raise awareness, support conflict-affected women and girls, and collect data on the impacts of armed violence and sexual crimes being committed. Our purpose is to stop the violence and build peace. We promote nonviolent political action, governmental accountability and implementation of UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 1889 for sustainable diplomatic outcomes backed by accountable governance and security institutions.

→ Women across the world demand an end to armed violence and arms trading, which must not be legitimised as routes to gain wealth and power. We call for high level political and diplomatic actions to end the armed conflicts in the African Great Lakes Region, through effective Inter-Rwanda and Inter-Uganda dialogues, as well as to repair the consequences of the UN Operation Turquoise, in which UN SC mandated troops were complicit in genocide and crimes against humanity in 1994. These dialogues should be under UN Security Council auspices and include equal numbers of representative women, whose involvement is essential for good governance, sustainable peace, development, security, human rights and environmental protection.

→ The UN Security Council and its (P-5) permanent members must recognise their responsibilities in law, morality and practice. The UNSC and all governments must end impunity and complicity with the multinational companies, governments, organisations and armed groups that commit international humanitarian and economic crimes that blight the lives of civilians. Legal enforcement and financial penalties must be applied to prevent multinational companies and governments from profiting from and colluding with armed groups and illegal regimes that exploit, dehumanise and harm women, children and civilians.

→ As long as the UN's *Mapping Report for DRC* is hidden away in a filing cabinet, its recommendations are not implemented, and all the perpetrators whose names are quoted in the Report are not brought to justice, there is no way for peace and security to come to the African Great Lakes Region.

We, the undersigned, endorse the request by COMMON CAUSE UK to meet with the UK government, including Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, the Foreign Minister, the Minister for Africa, and others, as a matter of urgency, to discuss UK responsibilities and how best to stop the further perpetration of armed violence, sexual exploitation, and dehumanisation of women and girls in D.R.Congo.

Million Women Rise Coalition

Women in Black (WiB) London

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF UK)

AIDD Women Peace & Security Congo Project (contact for letter: info@acronym.org.uk)