

May 20, 2013

Ms. Mary Robinson
United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region
Mary Robinson Foundation, Trinity College
6 Sth Leinster Street
Dublin 2, Ireland

Urgent Appeal from Congolese Human Rights Activists to Stop Rwandan Support to the M23 and to Bring M23 Leaders to Justice

Dear Ms. Robinson,

We, representatives of 82 Congolese human rights organizations, congratulate you for your nomination as Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region. We thank you for your engagement as well as your special interest in contributing to the return of peace and security in this region. We applaud you for accepting this daunting task.

There are dozens of armed groups in our country committing human rights violations. Serious, concerted action by the Congolese government, with the support of international actors, is urgently needed to end the threat posed by these groups and to restore state authority throughout the country. In this letter, we would like to highlight recent atrocities committed by the M23. This rebel movement in eastern Congo presents the greatest threat to Congo and regional stability today because of the amount of territory it controls, its military capacity, and the support it receives from foreign actors.

While the international community and regional fora continue to look for political solutions, our sisters are being raped night and day and our brothers are being recruited forcibly by the M23. Every night, Congolese who live under the M23's control worry whether armed men will visit them and kidnap, rape or kill members of their family. Life has turned into a 24-hour contract, renewable each morning. In some villages, children can no longer go to school and are deprived of this basic right guaranteed in Congo's constitution.

The number of serious human rights violations committed by the M23 seems to have increased in recent weeks in Rutshuru territory. Here are some examples:

- Dozens of women and girls in Kalengera, Kitarama, Buchoko, Kazuba, Kivegerere – villages near one of the M23's main military bases in Rumangabo – have been raped by suspected M23 combatants in recent weeks. Many victims are terrified to speak out for fear of retribution by the M23. One of these victims told us:

Two combatants from the M23 found me in the field; they asked me to dig yams for them. Then they made me carry a bunch of bananas they had. When we got closer to the military camp, they told me to lie down on the ground, and then both of them raped me. After that, they told me if I dared to speak about what happened, they would return and kill me in my field. Since that day, I don't go out of my house because of fear... When the children ask me why I no longer go to the field, I feel my tears running because I don't have another field; it's only that field which feeds us and allows my children study. I don't have food to give them because I am a widow. My husband was killed in 2008...

- On April 13 at 5 p.m. Eric Mugwaneza, 15, was sitting in a shop in the village of Kasizi. An M23 soldier demanded proof that he had performed forced labor for the M23, a requirement in many parts of the territory under their control. When he was unable to provide proof, the soldier shot him in the chest. He was taken to a local health facility near Kibumba where he died at 2 a.m. the next morning.
- On April 18 at 11 p.m., armed men came to the home of Hamisi Katana Butunari, 54, a local village chief in Rukoro. He was tied up with a rope and told to say goodbye to his wife. In the morning, he was found beheaded 100 meters from his house. His genitals were also mutilated. He had spoken out against the M23 at a recent meeting.
- On the night of May 1, suspected M23 elements went on a looting spree in the town of Kiwanja. At least 400 houses were looted in Buzito and Buturande neighborhoods. In most cases, the looters demanded money and cell phones. Thirty six people were injured during the looting spree.
- Since March, we have also documented an increase in recruitment activities by the M23, including forced recruitment of children. Many of these new recruits have been taken to training centers (Rumangabo and Chanzu) where Rwandan army officers are teaching them how to fight. Presently, many children and young people don't attend school because they fear forced recruitment. Others have fled to Uganda and live in refugee camps. The future of young people in areas controlled by the M23 is precarious.

Ms. Robinson, these examples only provide a glimpse of the serious human rights abuses that are happening in the east of our country. It's risky for human rights activists to openly investigate these and other cases because the M23 have threatened human rights activists and members of civil society. Some of our colleagues have been abducted, beaten, or even killed.

We are also greatly concerned by the continued support by Rwandan officers to the M23. Between March 28 and April 23, multiple eye witnesses reported seeing Rwandan soldiers crossing the border into Congo at Kasizi, to fight alongside the M23. Some arrived on foot and others came in vehicles carrying weapons and ammunition. Sources say that these troops and military equipment came from the Rwandan army's military position at Njerima on the Rwandan side of the border with Congo. Rwandan army officers moved into three places (Rutezo, Songa and Kabira) in Busanza *groupement*, in Rutshuru territory. Residents say they have recognized some of these officers as former FDLR soldiers who had been sent back to Rwanda as part of the DDRRR program.

While Rwanda continues to deny its involvement in the movement, those of us based in Rutshuru live our lives among M23 fighters from Rwanda. Our colleagues have spoken with Rwandan soldiers who admit they were sent to Congo by Rwanda. While the international community debates this, we have no doubt: Many of the M23 combatants are Rwandans sent to Congo by the Rwandan army. Senior Rwandan officials continue to provide important support to the M23.

We have seen again and again over the past two decades how senior Rwandan officials have denied their country's abusive role in eastern Congo – despite clear evidence that Rwandan military officials were often deployed to Congo where they backed the AFDL, the RCD, the CNDP, and now the M23, as well as other proxy movements.

We urge you to see beyond the public declarations and denials you may hear from Rwandan officials. We ask you to ensure that we do not see a repetition of past failed agreements that

effectively gave *de facto* control of eastern Congo to Rwanda via their proxies. We also ask you to, in the strongest possible terms, publicly call on Rwanda and Uganda to end all military support to the M23 and other armed groups responsible for widespread abuses in eastern Congo.

We urge you to take a hardline against integrating M23 leaders into the Congolese army with long records of human rights abuses, men like Innocent Kayna, Sultani Makenga, Innocent Zimurinda, and Baudouin Ngaruye. These men have killed or supervised the killings and rapes of thousands of Congolese civilians. They are some of the worst human rights violators in our country, and they must appear before justice to answer for their despicable acts.

We support the deployment of the new Intervention Brigade, as long as it takes all possible measures to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law. We hope the brigade encourages M23 combatants to lay down their arms. We hope it carries out focused operations to arrest rebel leaders responsible for some of the worst atrocities.

The majority of combatants – many of whom are children who were recruited by force and have no professional military training or experience – need a safe, viable alternative. For this reason, a new Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration process is crucial. Past attempts have failed: The money disappeared and former combatants who had gathered at regroupment centers returned to the bush to re-join armed groups weeks or months later when there was no follow-up from the government. The new program needs to be well run, with a strong oversight mechanism and long-term civilian job opportunities for former combatants. This program should be developed and implemented before the start of the brigade's military operations.

We have reached a key moment in our country: If our government and others in the region respect their commitments as enshrined in the agreement signed in Addis Ababa, we will move toward peace and justice. If they don't respect the agreement, Congo will continue its downward spiral.

In conclusion, we are very grateful for the special attention you will give to our concerns and recommendations. We are happy to provide you with any additional information you may need.

Please accept, Madam Mary Robinson, the assurances of our highest consideration.

The following 82 Congolese human rights organizations are signatories to this letter:

1. Action Contre l'Impunité pour les Droits Humains (ACIDH), Kinshasa
2. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture au Nord-Kivu (ACAT/NK), Province du Nord-Kivu
3. Action Femme pour le Développement (AFD), Province du Sud-Kivu
4. Action Globale pour la Promotion Sociale et Paix (AGPSP), Province du Nord-Kivu
5. Action pour la Promotion des Jeunes Filles (APROJEFI), Province du Nord-Kivu
6. Action pour la Protection des Droits Humains et de Développement Communautaire (APDHU), Province du Sud-Kivu
7. Action pour la Réhabilitation et l'Encadrement des Populations Sinistrées (AREPS), Province du Nord-Kivu
8. Actions des Femmes pour les Droits et le Développement (AFD), Province du Sud-Kivu
9. Africa Justice Peace and Development (AJPD), Province du Nord-Kivu
10. Aide – Kivu, Province du Sud-Kivu
11. Association d'Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs de la République Démocratique du Congo (AEJT RDC), Province du Sud-Kivu
12. Association Africaine de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ASADHO), Kinshasa

13. Association Congolaise des Droits de l'Homme (ACDHO), Province du Kasai Occidental
14. Association Congolaise pour l'Accès à la Justice (ACAJ), Kinshasa/Province du Katanga
15. Association pour le Développement de Kitamba – Mwenga (ADKI), Province du Sud-Kivu
16. Association pour les Nations Unies de la RD Congo (ANU RDC), Province du Sud-Kivu
17. Blessed Aid, Province du Nord-Kivu
18. Campagne Pour la Paix (CPP), Province du Nord-Kivu
19. Caucus des Femmes, Kinshasa
20. Centre d'Observation des Droits de l'Homme et Assistance Sociale (CODHAS), Province du Nord-Kivu
21. Centre des Recherches sur l'Environnement, la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (CREDDHO), Province du Nord-Kivu
22. Centre Olame, Province du Sud-Kivu
23. Club des Journalistes Sensibles aux Conflits/Sud-Kivu (JSC), Province du Sud-Kivu
24. Coalition Congolaise pour la Justice Transitionnelle (CCJT), Province du Sud-Kivu
25. Collectif des Organisations des Jeunes Solidaires du Congo-Kinshasa (COJESKI), RD Congo
26. Communicateurs pour la Promotion, Protection et Défense des Droits de l'Homme (COPPRODDHO), Province du Kasai Oriental
27. Congo Peace Network (CPN), Province du Nord-Kivu
28. Dauphins Munzirwa-Kataliko (DAUPHINS), Province du Sud-Kivu
29. Défense et Assistance aux Femmes et Enfants Vulnérables (DAFEVA), Province du Nord-Kivu
30. Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des ménages vulnérables (EFIM), Province du Nord-Kivu
31. Femme solidaire pour la paix et le développement (FSPD)
32. Femmes Unies pour le progrès Social (FUPROS), Province du Nord-Kivu
33. Fondation AGAPE, Province du Sud-Kivu
34. Fondation Point de Vue des Jeunes Africains pour Développement (FPJAD), Province du Nord-Kivu
35. Fondation Rama Levina (FORAL), Province du Sud-Kivu
36. Fondation Révérend Père Henri Matota pour le Développement et la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (FRPHMD), Kinshasa
37. Forum de la Femme Ménagère (FORFEM), Kinshasa
38. Forum des Organisations Nationales pour les Actions Humanitaires et le Développement (FONHAD), Province du Nord-Kivu
39. Groupe d'Assistance aux Marginalisés (GAM), Province du Sud-Kivu
40. Groupe d'association de défense des droits de l'homme et de la paix (GADHOP), Province du Nord-Kivu
41. Groupe Jérémie, Province du Sud-Kivu
42. Groupe LOTUS, Kisangani/Province Orientale
43. Héritiers de la Justice, Province du Sud-Kivu
44. Human Rescue, RD Congo
45. Initiative Congolais pour la Justice et la Paix (ICJP), Province du Sud-Kivu
46. Jeunesse Unie pour les Initiatives de Développement (JUID), Province du Nord-Kivu
47. Justice Plus, Bunia/Province Orientale
48. La Voix de sans Voix ni Liberté (VOVOLIB), Province du Sud-Kivu
49. Ligue des Electeurs, Kinshasa
50. Ligue des Sacrifices Volontaires pour la Défense des Droits Humains et l'Environnement (LISVDEHE), Province du Nord-Kivu
51. Nouvelles Dynamiques pour le Développement Rural Intégral (NODRI), Mbandaka/Equateur
52. Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH), Kinshasa
53. Observatoire Congolais des Prisons (OCP), Province du Nord-Kivu
54. Observatoire Gouvernance et Paix (OGP), Province du Sud-Kivu

55. Œil des Victimes des Violations des Droits de l'Homme (OVVDDH), Province de Bandundu
56. Œil pour le Développement du Congo (ODC), Province du Sud-Kivu
57. Parlement des Jeunes de la RD Congo (PJRDC), Province du Nord-Kivu
58. Peace and Human Dignity and Development (PHDD), Province du Nord-Kivu
59. Programme Appuis aux Initiatives Féminines (PAIF), Province du Nord-Kivu
60. Promotion de la Démocratie des Droits Humains (PDH), Province du Nord-Kivu
61. Promotion et la Défense des Droits des Communautés Autochtones Pygmées (PREPPYG), Province du Nord-Kivu
62. Réseau d'Actions Citoyennes pour la Démocratie (RACID), Province du Nord-Kivu
63. Réseau d'Organisation des Droits Humains et d'Education Civique d'Inspiration Chrétienne (RODHECIC), RD Congo
64. Réseau Genre et Droit des Femmes (GEDROFE), Kinshasa
65. Réseau National des ONG des Droits de l'Homme de la République Démocratique du Congo (RENADHOC), RD Congo
66. Réseau Provincial des ONG de Droits Humains au Congo (REPRODHOC), RD Congo
67. Société civile noyau de Kadutu, Province du Sud-Kivu
68. Société Civile pour les Droits de l'Homme (SCIPDHO), Province du Bas-Congo
69. Solidarité Action Sociale (SAS), Province du Sud-Kivu
70. Solidarité et Fraternité dans l'Action (SOFAC), Province du Nord-Kivu
71. Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI), Beni/Province du Nord Kivu – Bunia/Province Orientale – Kinshasa
72. Solidarité pour la Promotion Sociale et la Paix (SOPROP), Province du Nord-Kivu
73. Soutien aux Initiatives de Développement et la Protection (SIDEP), Province du Nord-Kivu
74. Syndicat d'Initiative du Kasha (SIKASH), Province du Sud-Kivu
75. Synergie Vie et Paix (SVP), Province du Nord-Kivu
76. Toges Noires, Kinshasa
77. Union d'Action pour les Initiatives de Développement (UAID), Province du Nord-Kivu
78. Union des Familles pour la Recherche de la Paix (UFAREP), Province du Nord-Kivu
79. Union des Rasta pour la Paix et le Développement (URPD), Province du Sud-Kivu
80. Unité des Volontaires pour le Développement Social (UVDS), Province du Nord-Kivu
81. Vision Communautaire (VICO), Province du Sud-Kivu
82. Voix des Sans Voix (VSV), Kinshasa