

HOW MANY MORE CIVILIANS WILL BE KILLED IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS AND UNITED STATES ACT?

Letter of Boston University School of Theology Peacemakers to Barack Obama, President of the United States of America.

Boston University School of Theology
JUSTPEACE Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation
Boston Theological Institute

Religion and Conflict Transformation Program
745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215
Tel: 617-353-3050; Website: http://www.bu.edu/sth

Boston, January 20, 2010

HOW MANY MORE CIVILIANS WILL BE KILLED IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE UNITED STATES ACT?

Letter of Boston University School of Theology Peacemakers to Barack Obama, President of the United States of America

CC: Susan Rice, United States Ambassador to the United Nations,

Mr. President,

We, Boston University School of Theology students, committed to becoming Peacemakers like you, congratulate you for earning a Nobel Peace Price and earnestly appeal to your leadership to help stop the violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where proxy rebels and armies have killed more than six million civilians in order to occupy their land and loot its minerals resources. Our appeal to you is rooted in our belief that you are creating a new culture in this world, a culture of justpeace.

We believe also in the mission of the United Nations (UN) which was created according to its Charter, to maintain international peace and security; promote effective collective measures against acts of aggression (I, 1, 1); and develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples (I, 1, 2), without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion (I, 1, 3).

At the moment when the USA and the UN claim to be engaged in the pursuit of the above-mentioned goals, we are outraged to learn about a repetitive violation of the territorial integrity of the D. R .Congo by Rwandan and Ugandan proxy rebellions that carry on daily massacres and assassinations of innocent civilians, journalists, priests, nuns; rape and sexual violence against women and men; and the displacement of 3 millions of Congolese left homeless by the torching of their homes. According to the UN radio in the Congo, and a report published by the Congolese National Commission for Refugees (C.N.R) in November 2009, more than 12,000 people armed with machine guns and cattle have invaded the Coltan-rich North Kivu province

from neighboring Rwanda. Three hundred and fifty seven invader families are in the village of Kibumba, North-Kivu.

From our Congolese colleague, Vincent Machozi, who has seen first-hand this tragedy and who is a founding member of the Beni-Lubero Foundation active in North-Kivu, we have seen the faces of the victims, and read the stories of the survivors published daily on a local website www.benilubero.com.

Mr President, it is clear that international community has failed to stand against the inhumanity that has been going on in Congo for so long. The Congo Catholic Bishops have called this tragedy" a silent genocide," with more than six million Congolese killed, a figure equivalent to the Holocaust. It is happening on the watch of the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo known as MONUC, the U.S. ambassador in Kinshasa, and the U.S. Consulate in North Kivu. It is shocking that a conflict of this magnitude has not made headlines in the U.S. media, as was the case in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda, where the world came together to end violence and restore justice and dignity to the survivors. How many more civilians will be killed in the Democratic Republic of Congo before the United Nations and the U.S. act and say "not on our watch"?

From our research on the Congo conflict, we reached the same conclusion as the UN experts that it is fuelled by external powers and special interests for the control of natural resources. Since its beginning in 1996, Rwanda and Uganda have served as the main intermediaries with world businesses behind the war and the looting of Congo minerals.

The UN experts' reports (available in documents S/2002/1146 of October 15, 2002, and S/2009/603 of November 23, 2009) establish a long list of countries, corporations, banks and middle-men involved in plundering Congo mineral resources and purchasing weapons for militias and national armies in the region, which cause atrocities that the mind can believe. So far, none of those cited in these reports has been held accountable by the UN, though the experts have said that, unless the international and economic motives that engendered the Congo conflict are addressed, there will be no progress towards sustainable peace in Congo.

We know that the U.S. Congress has initiated a bipartisan effort to curb the conflict minerals trade in the D. R. Congo by passing a bill in the Senate and the House that will lead to a creation of mineral-tracing mechanisms to allow consumers around the world to purchase conflict-free cell phones, laptops, video games, and aircrafts. During her visit to Eastern Congo in August 2009, the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asked the international community to take action towards companies fuelling the Congo conflict, to prevent the mineral wealth from the DRC ending up in the hands of those who fund the violence.

The peace efforts brokered by the UN and some superpowers achieved peace between top-level Congolese leaders and proxy warlords in March 2009, leaving out Congolese people at the grassroots level. The warlords and their militias were integrated in the National Army. But, instead of becoming an instrument of peace, the integrated army has continued and increased violence against Congolese civilians at a level never reached before the Peace Agreement. Without surprise, this inexplicable violence is happening on the watch of the UN in North-Kivu, South-Kivu, and Province Orientale, three provinces with common borders with Rwanda and Uganda, and home to 80% world reserve of Coltan. This has led Congolese people to accuse the UN of helping Rwanda carve for itself a territory in Eastern Congo with the complicity of

Congolese top-level leaders, who have remained silent while Congolese civilians are being massacred and their homes burned down by the integrated national army.

In the face of this strange situation, which Congolese people have called acts of treason by their top-level leaders, many collaborative initiatives for peace and development have emerged. These include the Civil Society, the National Conference of the Congo Catholic Bishops, many local and international NGOs, all of which are working tirelessly to make the world aware of the human tragedy taking place in Eastern Congo, despite the official statements of peace missions accomplished. The above associations are asking for a round table of dialogue with the Congolese top-level leaders in order to act together on the invasion by Rwandans and the increased violence against civilians in Eastern Congo at the hands of the integrated national army despite of the Peace Agreement signed in Goma on March 23, 2009.

Mr President, you were right in your speech in Ghana on July 11, 2009, that in the 21st Century the key to the success of nations is "capable, reliable and transparent institutions - strong parliaments, honest police forces, independent judges and journalists, vibrant private sector and civil society" and that there is "no prosperous and stable government without respect of the will of the people".

Mr President, we appeal now to your leadership to help stop the invasion of Congo and the massacres of its civilians by working through the UN for the enforcement of its charter and for a fair and transparent minerals' trade in Congo.

Boston University School of Theology Peacemakers

1. Benjamin Lynch, Penns Creek, PA (USA)
2. Betsy Slate, Fremont, CA (USA)
3. Christina Tinglof, Boston, MA (USA)
4. John C. Prust, West Bend, WI (USA)
5. Kasey Cox, Tarpon Springs, FL (USA)
6. Rodney Petersen, Newton, MA (USA)
7. Sheehan Daniel Scarborough, Abington, PA (USA)
8. Thomas Porter, Wellesley, MA (USA)
9. Valerie Chung, Malden, MA (USA)
10. Vincent Machozi, Beni-Lubero, North-Kivu (D.R. Congo)
11. Virginia Lee Hanna, Lafayette, LA (USA)
12. Shandirai Mawokomatanda, Harare (Zimbabwe)

    Boston University, MA (USA)