

July 4, 2003

Right Honourable Jean Chrétien
House of Commons
Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien,

We, speaking together as the member churches of the Canadian Council of Churches, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives and Project Ploughshares, write to urge intensified efforts by Canada and the international community to provide protection to the vulnerable people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), especially the people of Bunia in the Ituri District, and to provide effective support for the current transitional government of the DRC. The chaos of Bunia is only the latest event in a series of tragedies that has been possible due to the woefully inadequate engagement by the international community, including Canada, in the face of ongoing injustices such as:

- the death of some 3.3 million Congolese since 1998, according to the estimates of the International Rescue Committee in April 2003;
- illegal occupation of Congolese territory by neighbouring countries, especially Uganda and Rwanda since 1998;
- illegal extraction of the DRC's natural resources by occupying countries; and
- large scale human rights violations committed by all the parties to the conflict including massacres of civilians, the use of rape as a weapon of war, and cannibalism as a means of sowing terror.

Along with much of the rest of the world, many of us have paid insufficient attention to the extraordinary humanitarian crisis that has emerged in the DRC. The current situation is itself a product of decades of conflict, which the world has both exploited and ignored. Canadian churches and church agencies have been, and continue to be, present in the DRC. We continue our humanitarian and peacebuilding work in cooperation with partners in the region. But the severity of the crisis, as well as the imperatives of human security and our common humanity with the people of Africa, point to the need for urgent and effective responses in support of the people of the DRC.

Despite the many resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, it took until September of 2002 for Rwanda to leave the DRC, and Uganda left only in April of this year. Recent reports from some partners in South Kivu indicate that Rwandan troops are active in the country once again. Unfortunately, the troops of the UN Observer Mission (MONUC) have been unable to prevent the massacres of civilians, whether in Kisangani in 2002 or this year in Bunia. We

therefore urge you to continue to work with your colleagues in the G8 to implement the Africa Action Plan adopted at Kananaskis, which promised "to make conflict prevention and resolution [in Africa] a top priority..." We appreciate your support for this priority and urge you to continue to work with your colleagues in the G8 to make it a reality.

The primary focus of the Interim Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF), directed by France and joined by Canada, under the mandate of the United Nations Security Council should be protection of the vulnerable. The report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty has rightly noted that when governments are incapable or unwilling to protect their own citizens, it is the responsibility of the international community to come to the aid of those who are in grave peril. Such a situation has clearly existed in the DRC for some time, and so the international community must now act effectively to protect the vulnerable and control the violence through an effective international policing force, and to begin to create the conditions for the long-term work of building peace and restoring relationships between the peoples of Bunia and the region. We pray that the IEMF will be effective and thus allow the Ituri Pacification Commission, which was established on April 13, to begin its work. The Commission's efforts to restore peace in the regions of conflict will in turn create better conditions for the Congolese peace process as a whole. We urge you to remain committed to the peace process for the entire DRC and we are very pleased with the participation of Canada in the International Monitoring Committee.

Finally, we must mention the activities of Canadian companies who continue to operate in the region, some of them in Ituri District itself. The last report of the United Nations Group of Experts cited 8 Canadian companies that were in violation of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) guiding principles for transnational corporations. The government of Canada should verifiably reassure the Congolese people that these companies fully abide by basic principles of corporate social responsibility and that their activities are not prolonging or, indeed, exacerbating the conflict by providing resources and legitimacy to militias and armed forces.

In summary, we recommend that the Canadian government:

- encourage sustained and increased funding through CIDA and other agencies for peacebuilding activities in those areas of the country where active fighting is not occurring; and
- significantly increase support for the work of the International Monitoring Committee on the peace accords;
- strongly support a further increase in human resources for MONUC for the purposes of protecting civilians;
- encourage increased international support for the protection efforts of the Interim Emergency Multinational Force;

- call Canadian companies to account, ensuring that they abide by codes of conduct for corporate responsibility that include effective compliance, verification, and monitoring initiatives so that Canadian companies in no way prolong the conflict in the DRC.

The challenges of Africa are immense, and nowhere more so than in the DRC. All peoples are created in the image of God with a vocation of service to one another and creation – this is the source of human dignity and consequently human rights. We may not, therefore, neglect any corner of creation. When conflict and poverty prevents people from exercising their rights and vocation, we are called to build peace and restore right relationships. Building a more peaceful world, where human rights and dignity are respected, is honourable work.

Be assured that our prayers are with you, and may your efforts be blessed,

Prof. Richard Schneider

President

Canadian Council of Churches

Jane Orion Smith

Chair

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Moira Hutchinson

Board Chair

Project Ploughshares

CC: The Honourable Bill Graham, Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Honourable John J. McCallum, Minister of National Defence