

Urgent Call to Action:

Protecting Human Rights and Promoting Nonviolence for Sustainable Peace in the DRC

Pax Christi International and EurAc Open Letter

Brussels, August 26th, 2024

Pax Christi International and Europe – Central Africa Network (EurAc), following the July 17th [webinar "Towards Sustainable Peace in the DRC"](#), **express deep concern over the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**. While we welcome the conclusion of a ceasefire agreement between Rwanda and the DRC as a step in the right direction, humanitarian truces¹ and ceasefire attempts² cannot be considered a viable path to a long-term solution, especially when they are not respected and violence persists³. With the repeated ceasefire violations witnessed in the past month and the dramatic deterioration of the medical and sanitary conditions⁴, we believe it is urgent to address the underlying issues to ensure lasting peace and security in the region. **As organisations committed to peace and nonviolence, we urge the parties directly involved in the conflict, along with the wider international community, to immediately embrace nonviolent methods (such as dialogue and diplomatic efforts) to resolve disputes and ensure the protection of human rights.**

1. Boost Mediation Efforts and Find a Political and Regional Solution to the Conflict

The instrumentalisation of armed groups by all regional actors threatens to destabilise the entire region. With the military approach reaching its limits, it is now crucial for all parties involved in the conflict to reinstate regional mediation efforts under the Nairobi⁵ and Luanda⁶ processes. The international community must support the effective implementation of the recent ceasefire in order to find a lasting solution to the conflict and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. These initiatives must be complemented by the establishment of an inclusive dialogue at all levels, involving representatives from civil society and local communities.

2. Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity

We ask the international community and neighbouring countries to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC within its borders. For the international community, this entails

¹ Source: *White House welcomes 15-day DR Congo humanitarian truce extension*, [https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/white-house-welcomes-15-day-dr-congo-humanitarian-truce-extension-2024-07-18/#:~:text=July%2017%20\(Reuters\)%20%2D%20A,and%20Rwanda%20backed%20M23%20rebels](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/white-house-welcomes-15-day-dr-congo-humanitarian-truce-extension-2024-07-18/#:~:text=July%2017%20(Reuters)%20%2D%20A,and%20Rwanda%20backed%20M23%20rebels)

² Source: *Democratic Republic of the Congo: Bishops call on warring parties to respect ceasefire agreement*, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2024/08/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-bishops-call-on-warring-parties-to-respect-ceasefire-agreement>

³ Source: *"Eastern DRC: Rwanda and M23 accused of violating truce"*, <https://www.africanews.com/2024/07/12/eastern-drc-rwanda-and-m23-accused-of-violating-truce/>

⁴ Source: *IRC launches emergency response as Mpox outbreak in DRC spreads*, <https://www.rescue.org/eu/press-release/irc-launches-emergency-response-mpox-outbreak-drc-spreads>

⁵ Source: *EAC-led Nairobi Process*, <https://www.eac.int/nairobiprocess>

⁶ Source: *Luanda Peace Process*, <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/236>

strongly condemning the repeated military incursions by Rwandan forces on Congolese soil⁷ in support of the M23 in various territories of North Kivu province in the eastern DRC and asking for the immediate departure of its troops. Uganda's military support to the M23 must also be denounced for contributing to instability in the region. Finally, it is crucial to continue implementing sanctions against all individuals involved in political and military initiatives and movements that threaten regional stability and peace.

3. Increased Diplomatic and aid efforts by the European Union and the United Nations

We call on the European Union and the United Nations to boost their support to long-term stability and security in the region, by increasing diplomatic and financial aid to strengthen peacekeeping, human rights, and efforts led by regional players. We also call for greater emphasis on holding human rights violators accountable, upholding international standards, and facilitating dialogue and mediation to address conflicts and promote lasting peace.

Additionally, it is vital to support, through collaboration with State and non-State actors, the local communities in their paths towards nonviolence. This includes investing in education and initiatives that promote nonviolent conflict resolution and peacebuilding, which are essential for breaking the cycles of violence and fostering lasting stability⁸.

4. Investigate and Prosecute Perpetrators of Human Rights Violations

It is crucial that the DRC government, as well those of which countries are involved directly and not in the violence, with the support of the international community, conducts thorough and transparent investigations into all human rights abuses and violations perpetrated against the civilian population by all parties, including cases of intimidation, threats, attacks, and assassinations of human rights defenders and journalists. These investigations should adhere to international standards, such as the Minnesota Protocol⁹, to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. Establishing transitional justice mechanisms adapted to the local realities is essential to achieve reconciliation.

5. Strengthen Protection for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists

The safety of human rights defenders and journalists in the DRC, particularly in the eastern regions, remains precarious. The 2023 law on the protection of human rights defenders¹⁰ should be reviewed to ensure it does not increase risks for human rights defenders providing effective protection in line with the UN Human Rights Defenders Declaration (1998)¹¹. There must be systematic investigations,

⁷ Source: *Letter dated 31 May 2024 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council*, <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/final-report-group-experts-democratic-republic-congo-s2024432-enarruzh>

⁸ Source: *Since 2018, Pax Christi International has successfully trained youth in nonviolence in the DRC, Burundi, and Rwanda. Specialised training for Religious Sisters began in 2021 and now includes Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, continuing until 2026. More:* <https://paxchristi.net/programmes/empowering-religious-sisters-and-youth-in-active-nonviolence/>

⁹ Source : *The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016), The Revised United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions*, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/MinnesotaProtocol.pdf>

¹⁰ Source: *Law No.23/927 on the protection and responsibility of human rights defenders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, adopted on 15 June 2023*, <https://ishr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Loi-N%C2%B0-23-027-du-15-juin-2023-DDH-RDC.pdf>

¹¹ Source: *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom*, 53/144, 1998, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration.pdf>

through nonviolent measures, into threats and acts of violence against these vital voices of truth and justice.

6. Create a Safe Environment for Civil Society and Human Rights Organisations

The government, with the consistent and secured support of the international community, must ensure a safe and secure environment for civil society organisations. This includes protecting their right to freedom of expression, to peaceful assembly and association and providing support for those threatened and / or attacked due to their advocacy work. The international community must intensify its support for Congolese civil society and make its protection a foremost priority.

7. End Violence Against Women and Girls

We firmly condemn the violence committed against women and girls and call for an end to impunity by prosecuting those responsible for these war crimes. Additionally, we demand the protection of women and girls and their full participation in peace agreements, as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security adopted in 2000¹². Ensuring their involvement in peace processes is crucial for achieving comprehensive and lasting peace.

8. Combat Illegal Exploitation and Trade of Natural Resources

We denounce the plundering of the DRC's natural resources, which are illegally exported by criminal networks and armed groups to neighbouring countries with the complicity of multinational corporations. The illicit trade and exploitation of minerals remains crucial in financing the conflict. Both regional and international actors must encourage efforts towards improving the transparency and traceability of raw materials.

In conclusion, **we urge the international community and the DRC government to take immediate and decisive action to address these critical issues**. The indefinite ceasefire represents a positive development that we very much welcome, but it must be accompanied by long-term and concrete measures to **ensure lasting peace and security in the DRC**.

We stand ready to bring our expertise and support to all efforts towards achieving this goal through nonviolent means.

Pax Christi International and Europe – Central Africa Network (EurAc)



¹² Source: *Resolution 1325 (2000)*, Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SC_ResolutionWomenPeaceSecurity_SRES1325%282000%29%28english_0.pdf