

Congo Legislation Positive Step for Peace

By Michael Poffenberger

A bipartisan group of U.S. Senators have introduced legislation that would establish a more comprehensive and progressive U.S. policy toward the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act would require the U.S. Government to promote humanitarian relief, security, democracy and transparent management of natural resources to help end the conflict in the DRC and move the country towards stability and peace.

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A 2004 study by International Rescue Committee found that 31,000 people in the DRC were dying each month due to the effects of violence in the eastern region, and that 3.8 million people had died in the previous 6 years. The war has cost more lives than any other conflict since World War II. It began in 1997, when Uganda and Rwanda successfully invaded the DRC to overthrow its President, Mobutu Sese Seko. They invaded again in 1998, this time to overthrow Mobutu's successor, Laurent Kabila. In response, three other countries—Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia—intervened to defend Kabila and fought against Rwanda and Uganda. The withdrawal of the troops of these countries in late 2002 left behind a DRC in shambles. Multi-national corporations played—and continue to play, according to many—a dominant role in fuelling a war economy through arms sales and exploitation of Congo's resource wealth.

Although a peace agreement among the major rebel factions has been forged, democratic transition has yet to take place. A referendum held late last year ratified the struggling nation's constitution, and set the stage for elections this year. Violence continues to wrack the mineral-rich region of eastern Congo, where Uganda and Rwanda are still suspected of supporting several of the local militias. A recent incursion by the Sudan- and Uganda-based Lord's Resistance Army has caused yet another reason for concern. The DRC is approximately the same size as the whole of Western Europe, and the stability of the entire continent of Africa is affected by dynamics in the country.



UN Peacekeepers in DRC are tasked with disarming rebel groups and maintaining the gains that have been made.

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“If Africa is to achieve its promise, resolving the problems in the Congo will be critical,” said Illinois Senator Barack Obama, the primary sponsor of the proposed legislation. “Already, the region’s overlapping ethnic identities, and abundant natural resources have made the country a magnet for fighters from a half-dozen neighboring countries. If left untended, Congo’s bloodshed will continue to infect the entire region and the continent.” The bill is also sponsored by Kansas Senator Sam Brownback, Illinois Senator Richard Durbin, and Ohio Senator Mike DeWine.

The bill establishes fourteen core principles of US policy, authorizes a 25 percent increase in US assistance for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, calls for a Special Envoy to address the situation in Eastern Congo, and urges the Administration to use its voice and vote at the United Nations Security Council to strengthen the UN peacekeeping force that is providing security in parts of

the Congo. The fourteen principles of US policy include:

- supporting the political and electoral process.
- overseeing development of multiparty democracy and rule of law.
- providing basic necessities to vulnerable populations.
- supporting development of professional military and police forces.
- expediting disarmament and reintegration of armed groups.
- promoting the role of religious and civil society institutions.
- and halting violence against women.

AFJN members are urged to contact their Senators and express support for this important legislation immediately!

Gender Equity Comes to AFJN

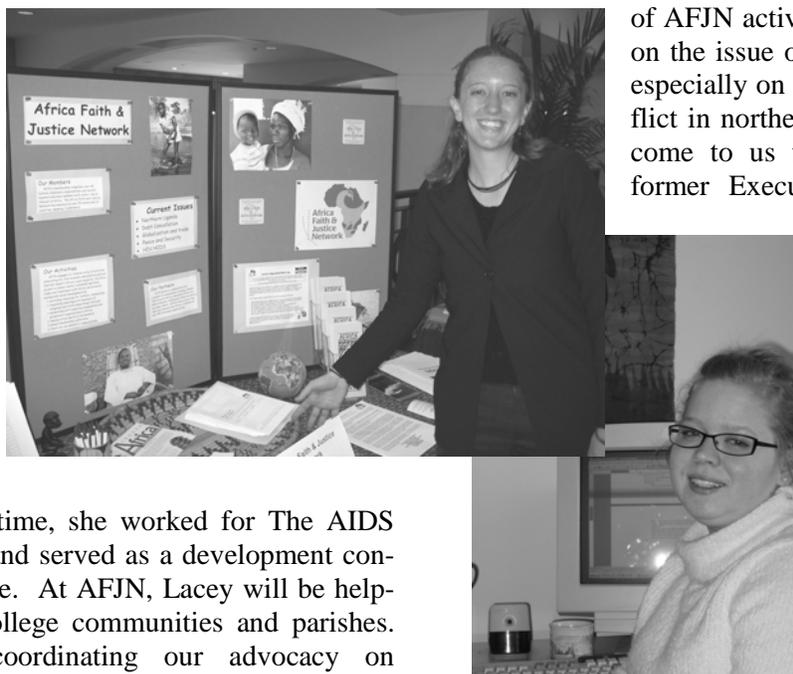
Following the departure of Patricia Puglis in mid December, the AFJN offices became an all-male bastion. They remained so until February 1, 2006, when Lacey Hausamen and Kathleen Mackin joined the staff. The former has come on board as a full-time, short term employee; the latter as an intern.

Lacey graduated from Notre Dame in 2003, with a degree in biology. She then spent two years in Uganda, as a Holy Cross lay missionary. While there, she taught science, English and computer science in secondary school. At the same time, she worked for The AIDS Support Organization and served as a development consultant for an orphanage. At AFJN, Lacey will be helping us reach out to college communities and parishes. She will also be coordinating our advocacy on HIV/AIDS issues.

Kathleen is a junior at George Mason University in northern Virginia, where she is majoring in government and international politics. She will be earning credits toward her degree, while interning at AFJN this semester.

Available for the whole range of AFJN activities, she will be focusing on the issue of child soldiers in Africa, especially on those involved in the conflict in northern Uganda. Kathleen has come to us through Marcel Kitissou, former Executive Director of AFJN, who is currently the Faculty Director of the Global Humanitarian Action Program at George Mason University.

It is our hope and conviction that their presence will strengthen AFJN’s advocacy for more just and effective U.S. policies toward the countries of Africa.



Lacey, left; Kathleen, right.

Movement for Peace in Northern Uganda Growing

By Peter Quaranto

Since May 2005 when AFJN made a commitment to work for peace in northern Uganda, the global movement has grown by leaps and bounds. The leadership of AFJN, through the Uganda Conflict Action Network (Uganda-CAN), has given new focus and energy to this peace movement. This energy has translated into numerous successes that we hope will lead this year – the war’s 20th – to bring long-awaited peace.

The conflict in northern Uganda, now Africa’s longest running war, has persisted for nearly 20 years with few prospects for resolution or relief. UNICEF reported early last year that mortality rates are far above emergency levels. More than 300,000 children under the age of five suffer from malaria, pneumonia, diarrhea and preventable diseases. Further, the Ugandan Ministry of Health and research partners concluded in November that there are at least 1,000 deaths every week related to the war, a number that places this crisis second only to the emergency in Democratic Republic of the Congo. Over 1.7 million people remain confined in camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) and more than 30,000 children have been abducted by the LRA. These numbers, and the myriad stories they represent, challenge our common Christian belief in compassion and solidarity.

In the last six months, AFJN volunteers across the country, including a growing base of youth, have been working tirelessly to demand responsibility from those in leadership positions in this situation. In June, we launched the Uganda-CAN website, which has become the leading source of news and analysis for the conflict. We have published editorials in major American, Ugandan, and Kenyan newspapers. We helped catalyze a September Senate briefing on the crisis in northern Uganda. We organized a dozen of the more than forty

October Global GuluWalks for the children of northern Uganda, gaining participation from tens of thousands of people (including many of you!) and coverage from scores of news outlets, including BBC World News. In November, language that we drafted to support a peaceful resolution to the conflict was used in a bill passed by the U.S. Congress. Our volunteers have appeared on television and radio talk shows. In December, we organized a call-in day that generated hundreds of phone calls to the U.S. Congress, asking policymakers to make northern Uganda a priority in 2006. We also raised \$15,000 to support mediation efforts, and we subsequently accompanied chief peace mediator Betty Bigombe to meetings with members of Congress and high-ranking State Department officials.



Night commuters find a place to spend the night in Gulu Town, away from the danger of a rebel attack.

Moving into 2006, AFJN continues this work to advocate for and with the communities of northern Uganda, bringing the voices and needs of people there to policymakers in New York City and Washington D.C. Passage of resolutions referencing the crisis at both the United Nations and in the U.S. Senate have sparked hope that this year will be the war’s final. In 2006, we hope to reach out to new communities across the United States, drawing attention to this forgotten crisis and mobilizing for action. Working with other non-governmental organizations and grassroots campaigns, we seek to launch a “Take Responsibility” advocacy coalition that works to shape responsible policy by both national governments and international bodies. We will send a delegation back to northern Uganda to strengthen our relationships with organizations and communities there. Working in solidarity and collaboration with our Ugandan sisters and brothers, we believe we can make a difference that not only ends the gross suffering of families in northern Uganda, but also sends forth ripples of hope for better and more humane U.S. policies towards the African continent.

Darfur Action Stalled as Violence Escalates

By Michael Poffenberger

In 1994, the duration of extreme genocidal violence in Rwanda was only 100 days - just over three months. The failure to gain international support for UN forces that could have helped protect the vulnerable Tutsi population during that time highlights the failure of the international community to save the lives of 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutus. In retrospect, the lack of response will likely be called one of the greatest failures of the global community in at least a generation. Both former US President Bill Clinton and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan have deemed their failures regarding Rwanda to be the biggest mistakes of their tenures in office.

While the clarity of hindsight and the speed at which the violence occurred may be a convenient scapegoat for policymakers who failed Rwanda, no such excuses can ever be made about Darfur. Genocide in the western region of Sudan was declared by the Bush Administration over a year and a half ago, and the violence there has been in plain sight of the international community since 2003. Yet the crisis continues, with a shocking trend towards escalating violence. Recent attacks by Sudanese government-backed militias on refugees in Darfur and neighboring Chad as well as the withdrawal of humanitarian aid groups from certain areas due to security concerns demonstrate the urgency to protect civilians and strive for a peaceful solution.

Approximately 7,000 African Union (AU) forces are currently deployed to monitor the situation. Covering such a large region effectively, however, will require more boots on the ground, as well as a mandate to be protectors of civilians as opposed to their current mandate to be mere monitors. The US has the Presidency of the UN Security Council during the month of February, and UN Ambassador John Bolton has expressed interest in the idea of “blue-hatting” the AU forces, or bringing them under the umbrella of a larger UN peacekeeping mission. The Security Council adopted a *statement* on Darfur, but this falls short of the *resolution* necessary to address the urgency of the

situation. The statement binds the UN to no action, demonstrating a lack of will by the international community to stop this genocide. A resolution needs to be approved sooner rather than later, as the lives of Darfuris are at stake. Moreover, US financial support for the AU troops will be depleted in March, and grassroots efforts to gain \$50 million for the AU have failed to pass appropriations bills in Congress. The funding is critical to maintaining the AU forces.

It is widely agreed that long-term peace will also require a political settlement. Peace talks between rebel and government representatives, now in their seventh round in Abuja, Nigeria, have been progressing slowly. Both sides have yet to declare comprehensive platforms in the negotiations.



A resurgence of violence in Darfur, along with the already devastating humanitarian situation demands the international community act to save millions of lives.

To bring this nightmare to an end, more grassroots pressure is needed. Recent efforts to prevent Sudan from becoming the 2006 chair of the African Union, supported by AFJN and a wide base of African and other organizations due to concerns about Darfur, was successful. The Darfur Peace and Accountability Act passed the Senate in November, but remains

stalled in the House, without the momentum to pass its committee hearings and go for a floor vote. *Call-ins to members of Congress are critical!* While the lack of meaningful and rapid action on Darfur is sure to represent a negative mark on the record of the international community, it is not too late to take the steps necessary to halt the violence and develop a sustainable peace.

Now Available!

“Sudan: Remembering, Responding and Rebuilding”

This free PowerPoint presentation on CD-ROM, produced by Catholic Relief Services, can be used as a resource tool for education and advocacy on Sudan. Help keep attention on this issue and work for an end to the conflict and humanitarian crisis.

To order copies please contact Alice Cutchember Tel: (410) 951-7264 or acutchember@crs.org

AFJN Happenings in brief...

Meetings:

- ◇ With Jendayi Frazer, Asst. Sec. of State for African Affairs, for all the members of the Advocacy Network for Africa.
- ◇ At the Embassy of the United Kingdom, to press for UN action on northern Uganda.
- ◇ With Rebecca Garang, widow of the late John Garang, former Vice-President of Sudan, and Betty Bigombe, peace mediator from Uganda.
- ◇ With the Northern Uganda Working Group.
- ◇ With the Congressional Human Rights Caucus.
- ◇ Accompanying Betty Bigombe to various meetings on Capitol Hill.
- ◇ UN session on northern Uganda.
- ◇ Panelist at a meeting with members of parliament from Niger, Chad, Mali, Senegal, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire.

Briefings:

- ◇ State Department: on peace and governance in the Great Lakes region of Africa.
- ◇ AFJN briefing with Betty Bigombe : on peace in northern Uganda.

Conferences/Workshops:

- ◇ Monrovia, Liberia: 3-day inter-religious consultation on consolidating peace in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea; organized by the USCMA and Church World Service.
- ◇ US Institute of Peace: the role of religions in building peace in Sudan.
- ◇ Woodrow Wilson Center: strategies to deal with war lords.
- ◇ Workshop at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops: how to do effective advocacy.

Sign-on Letters:

- ◇ For northern Uganda; addressed to Secretary Rice; initiated by AFJN; gained 33 organizational sponsors.
- ◇ For global AIDS funding.
- ◇ For funding for AU troops in Darfur

Demonstrations:

- ◇ At State Department: a "die-in" for peace in Darfur, Sudan.
- ◇ At the Embassy of Egypt: in favor of Sudanese refugees.
- ◇ At the White House: for peace in Darfur

Opportunities for Action

• **The Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act in the Senate Now** Senators Obama, Brownback, Durbin, and DeWine sponsored The Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act, which would require the U.S. Government to promote humanitarian relief, security, democracy, and transparent management of natural resources to help end the conflict in the DRC and move the country towards peace and stability. The bill establishes fourteen principles for development of U.S. policy, authorizes a 25 percent increase in U.S. humanitarian assistance for the country, calls for a the Bush Administration to appoint a Special Envoy for eastern Congo, and urges the Administration to use its voice and vote at the United Nations Security Council to strengthen the UN peacekeeping force that is providing security in parts of the country. **AFJN strongly encourages YOU to call your Senator and support this important legislation!**

• **Darfur Peace and Accountability Act Passes Senate, Still Awaiting Action in House**

The Darfur Peace and Accountability Act (S.1462 &H.R. 3127), while only a piece of a much larger puzzle, nonetheless is a substantive step for the US Congress to take in helping to end the ongoing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. The bill will contribute to expanding and strengthening the African Union mission to better protect civilians, to imposing focused sanctions on individuals responsible for atrocities in Darfur, and to supporting peace negotiations to resolve the conflict. The bill passed the Senate on Friday Nov. 18th and is still awaiting action in the House Committee on International Relations. **Please call your representatives in the House today!** The need is more urgent than ever to ensure that the genocide stops now.

• See AFJN's response, the **Uganda-CAN campaign** (www.ugandacan.org) for in-depth resources and advocacy opportunities for northern Uganda!

AFJN Open Letter to South African Bishop Kevin Dowling

Dear Bishop Dowling,

Recently, the board of the Africa Faith and Justice Network met, and we wish to express our gratitude for your contribution to our annual meeting. You honored us by accepting our Award, and we hope and pray for your continued work on behalf of the poorest and most neglected- our brothers and sisters with HIV/AIDS.

We spent some time reviewing the evaluations of the meeting. They were uniformly enthusiastic, as I am sure you sensed from the response to your presentation. Words like "inspiring," "hope-filled" and "challenging" came up again and again. The task before us now is to find concrete ways of sharing your vision.

Many of our member communities work with persons with AIDS, and through our web site, we will make your reflections available to them. We wish to underline our solidarity in your quest to find a just solution to the dilemmas of the infected and the threatened, especially wives of persons with AIDS and women forced into prostitution. If contextual theology has taught us anything, it is that the Church is learner as much as teacher, and we extend our support to you as you reflect in faith on the challenges of our tradition in the light of the new pandemic we face. Oppressive economic conditions have forced women into terrible moral choices, and we cannot but respond in the spirit of the Gospel.

Know that we pray for you and your staff colleagues, and thank you all for your witness to life.

Sincerely in Christ,

Robert A. Dowd, C.S.C.
Chair, AFJN Board of Directors

SIGN UP NOW:

Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice

March 10 - 13, 2006 Washington DC

AFJN is one of the core groups organizing *Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice* -- and we hope for a good AFJN turnout! This is a great way to become familiar with the work of our network.

The Africa Track is one of six tracks being presented at the event. This track will offer **briefings** and **workshops** on *trade, debt, HIV/AIDS, the right to water, Sudan, Liberia, small arms trafficking and more*. We will go to Capitol Hill on that Monday to lobby members of Congress on these issues.

We will prepare you with the information and skills you need for a successful meeting with your representative and senators.

For registration and other information, visit: <http://www.AdvocacyDays.org> or contact the AFJN office.

Africa Faith and Justice Network is a Catholic network of individual and group members focused on Africa and the experience of its people. AFJN is committed in faith to collaborate in the task of transforming United States mentality and policy on Africa. It seeks to be an instrument of education and advocacy on behalf of justice for Africa.

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Save the Date: AFJN Annual Conference

October 3-4, 2006; University of Notre Dame

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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Contributing Member \$35 _____ Organizational member \$1,000 _____

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Advocacy for justice and peace in Africa doesn't just happen. AFJN needs your help and participation! Thank you for your financial support.