

August 8, 2022



The Honorable Antony John Blinken
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

Re: Africa Faith and Justice Network Urges Frank Discussion for Lasting Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Dear Honorable Blinken,

Ahead of your August 2022 meetings with leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) (a non-partisan coalition of 28 US-based religious communities) urges frank discussions on the following issues: Rwanda's violations of DRC's territorial integrity, bad governance in the DRC, and reasons why the UN peacekeepers should leave.

AFJN calls on the US government to apply political pressure on the Rwandan government to withdraw from the DRC and refrain from destabilizing it through a proxy war. The DRC has gathered overwhelming evidence of the presence of Rwandan troops on its territory disguised as fighters of the rebel group M23. Rwanda's continued violations of the DRC's territorial integrity (oftentimes unprovoked) is unacceptable. For instance, it is well documented that Rwanda has links to the foundation of M23 and more recently has defended the grievances of M23 during the East African Community (EAC) peace talks organized by President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya. Rwanda's participation in the African Union's de-escalation talks in Angola, is a further acknowledgement of its involvement in the DRC. AFJN believes that the lack of open political space in Rwanda has also encouraged armed dissidents to use the DRC as a safe haven.

AFJN also calls on the US government to urge DRC President Felix Tshisekedi to redouble his efforts at institutional reforms including fighting corruption. Poor governance (such as the embezzlement of public funds, impunity, nepotism, etc.) has weakened the DRC for decades, making it susceptible to internal and external destabilization. President Tshisekedi is on record characterizing the DRC as "dead" and the army as "a mafia." He has also accused the justice system as unwilling to work with him to achieve his vision to fight corruption. In his State of the State speech on December 13, 2019, he said that "the fight against corruption and embezzlement of public funds would be the top priority." His government has taken steps to go after corrupt members of the armed forces, but very few have been arrested. The embezzlement of public funds and illegal arm sales would suggest that the army often puts personal gain ahead of the nation. AFJN believes that the US should support the work of the General Inspectorate of Finance in rooting out corruption.

AFJN further calls on the US government to urge the Ugandan government to deny M23 and any other militia the usage of its territory as a base for destabilizing the DRC. In a recent meeting, heads of states of the EAC resolved to send a force to fight all rebel groups, including M23, whose safe haven is in the eastern DRC. Currently, while the Ugandan army is fighting alongside the Congolese army against the Allied Democratic Forces militia, its position on M23 is unclear and deserves further scrutiny for lasting peace. Moreover, the well funded UN “Regional Service Center in Entebbe (RSCE) [which] provides administrative, logistics, information, and communications technology services to 19 UN missions across Africa,” financially benefits Uganda. It is therefore difficult to see how Uganda can be an impartial peace broker, with such an obvious conflict of interest.

Finally, AFJN calls on the US government to urge additional relief from the UN to ameliorate the increasing humanitarian crisis in the DRC as well as urging the UN to provide accountability for its stewardship. The instability caused by this continued conflict continues to exacerbate the cost of human lives, particularly the most vulnerable and those living in poverty. The ongoing popular demand for the UN to leave the DRC is due to persistent insecurity (beheadings, massacres, hostage taking, and burning of villages) in spite of its presence. The UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is perceived by the local people as a ‘cash cow’ instead of a peacekeeping and peace-imposing force. AFJN believes that the DRC is politically stable and has the enabling environment for self determination. AFJN also strongly believes in the self governance of the Congolese people. The US must therefore continue to support the Congolese as they strive for lasting solutions to their conflict. As the largest contributor to the UN, it is crucial that the US government urges the UN to reevaluate the mandate of UN peacekeeping missions in Africa and their role in the persistence of armed conflicts in the region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SNR', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Steven Nabieu Rogers, PhD
Executive Director