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February 21st, 2025

Mr. Marco Rubio, US Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20520

CC: - Mr. Risch, James E US Senator (ID)
Chairman of US Foreign Relations Committee
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building · Washington, DC, 20510
- All US Senators members of Foreign Relations Committee

Subject: Call for Action for a lasting peace and protection of Tutsi/Banyamulenge Ethnic group in Eastern Regions of D.R.Congo

Dear US Secretary of State,

We, members of ISÔKO_USA, a 501c3 US not-for profit organization representing US citizens and residents from the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the Tutsi ethnic group, wish to alert your department of the recent development in the ongoing conflict in the Eastern provinces of North and South Kivu and the root causes of these endless conflicts since 1990.

As US citizens of Congolese origin, we are grateful to the US government that granted us a second home after being discriminated against, denied our Congolese citizenship based on our ethnical identity and thousands were killed and others forced into exile in neighboring countries since 1996. These discriminations were fueled by a genocidal ideology that was spread by the perpetrators of the genocide against Tutsi in the neighboring country of Rwanda in 1994. From 1994 to date, the Tutsi and Banyamulenge in D.R.Congo were subjected to killing, looting of their livestock, and more recently, individuals of Tutsi appearance were stoned, killed and eaten by mobs that were instrumentalized by hate speech from Congolese officials and media.

This call for action follows multiple correspondences sent to President Biden, Secretary Antony Blinken and all the US senators to put pressure on the government of D.R.Congo to stop its support to the extremist militia groups based in Eastern D.R.Congo, who vow to cleanse the entire Tutsi ethnic group from the land of their ancestors. Our call for action is being reiterated by asking your assistance for a dialogue between the political and military actors, among them the M23 rebel group, which is composed mainly of Congolese Tutsi who escaped the cleansing in 1996 and were denied the right to be repatriated to the home country. This has led to the current military conflict with multidimensional levels – local, regional and international.

Below is a synopsis of the endless conflict in Eastern D.R. Congo from 1961-1965:

The first cleansing occurred between 1961 and 1965, after the death of then Prime Minister Lumumba, when in North Kivu Province, local militia armed by local leaders killed many Banyarwanda (common name of Hutu & Tutsi in Congo) in the territories of Masisi and Goma. They were labeled as “foreigners”, “infiltrated” from Rwanda (based on our mother tongue the “Kinyarwanda” language and culture shared with Rwandans), and so our parents were denied the right to participate in the second provincial elections of 1964. (See in attachment the report from US



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council report from Bukavu on October 29th, 1965). Many Tutsis and Hutus, also called “Banyarwanda,” were dumped in the lake near the city of Goma. These horrific events are known as the “Kanyarwanda war”.

From 1965, after the coup by President Mobutu, he imposed, with much dictatorship, temporary peace until the end of 1980’s while all the extremists were developing new strategies to fulfill their agenda to cleanse the country of the Tutsi.

Since 1990, only the Tutsi ethnic group in D.R.Congo has been selectively targeted with hate speech, killings, destruction of livestock, and sometimes cannibalism by extremist groups. The basis of this discrimination was based on hate speech from local and national leaders as detailed in multiple UN reports.

The first killings happened on March 1993 in Walikale territory, where more than 500 people were killed because of their ethnic identity. This led to a civil war, which lasted until early 1994, when the genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda took place and hundreds of thousands of members of the Rwandan genocidal militia and former Rwandan soldiers who had perpetrated the genocide took refuge in what was then Zaire. These undertook a campaign of propagating their ideology of hate of and discrimination against the Tutsi in the then Zaire.

Starting in July 1996 after the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, this genocidal ideology against Tutsi in D.R.Congo culminated in killings, arbitrary arrests, and decimation of livestock. Survivors who were rescued were sent to live in refugee camps in Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and Burundi, simply because they were Tutsi.

Today, after more than 30 years of victimization, it is undeniable that hate speech, exclusion, and incitement to violence against Congolese Tutsis are among the root causes of instability in eastern DRC.

It is the same hate speech that forced thousands of Congolese Tutsis into exile that continues to be propagated in the DRC by government officials, political leaders, journalists, and civil society actors. This hate rhetoric fuels crimes with genocidal intent, carried out by radicalized compatriots, anti-Tutsi local militias, and the FDLR, who use it as an ideological motivation for systematic attacks against members of the Congolese Tutsi community in North and South Kivu provinces. Even worse, these local militias and the FDLR receive support, supplies, arms, and maintenance from the Congolese government under the official status of RAD "Army Reserve for the FARDC," commonly known as "Wazalendo," who were authors of crimes and other human rights violations. These are among the more than 200 army groups who are now fighting alongside the official army, with the same goals of cleansing D.R.Congo of all Tutsis.

In support of this genocidal ideology, the Congolese government continues to radicalize civilians and its own armed groups, known as the Wazalendo, through debate programs aired on national television, particularly on RTNC (Radio-Télévision Nationale Congolaise) under the theme "30 years is enough"



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In these broadcasts, Congolese officials spread hate speech and exclusionary rhetoric against Congolese Tutsis, falsely claiming that these so-called refugees "do not even know their villages in Kivu," thus fueling suspicions and encouraging the perception that they are **"Rwandan foreigners."**

Furthermore, actors of civil society such as (Lucha RDC, FILIMBI, VERANDA MUTSHANGA, etc.) may indirectly be receiving financial support from the US government through non-profit organizations, thus contributing to this hate speech and denying the existence of Congolese refugees in neighboring countries.

The most outrageous is by one of the official leaders of the ruling party UDPS, José Mbenza, who declared on April 20, 2023, on a local channel in Kinshasa called Congo Buzz10, that **"by definition, Tutsis are bloodthirsty, while calling on Congolese people to arm themselves to get rid of this sentiment in DRC..."**. On April 23, 2023, his colleague, Joël Kitenge from the same ruling party, referred to **Tutsis as a 'bomb'**. Much of this kind of rhetoric is accompanied by accusations of Tutsi being **"infiltrators"**, which continuously represents Congolese Tutsis in the collective imagination of the population as criminals, thus making them liable to be killed with impunity by anyone. None of these officials who spread hate speech has been prosecuted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We, US citizens from Congolese Tutsi ethnic group, wish to recommend to the US government the following diplomatic actions to press the government of Kinshasa to end, once and for all, the discrimination of Tutsi and Banyamulenge in their home country:

- Engage in direct and frank dialogue with all the parties in conflicts, among them the M23 rebel group that has been seeking this dialogue since 2022.
- With the mediation of regional organization (EAC and SADC), to engage in dialogue with his neighbors, mostly Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, for the repatriation of all Congolese refugees after securing the Eastern regions in Kivu provinces.
- Work with the international community for the repatriation of all the FDLR from DRC to their country of origin (RWANDA) that should keep our regions safe of genocidal ideology.
- Prohibit and prosecute all those who propagate hate speech to protect the minority ethnic groups.
- Assist the Congolese government in building a transitional justice system that can be built from bottom up (from villages and communities to regions and nation level)

By taking such actions, it would demonstrate the full engagement of the US government to the stability of Eastern DRC and the Great Lakes region, particularly by fostering reconciliation among local communities and regional nations.

Mr. Secretary of State,

ISÔKO_USA supports all efforts of the US administration to bring a lasting peace in our homeland. But, if those root causes are not addressed, any measures – war or/and sanctions- may not bring sustainable peace.



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The involvement of your office and all the foreign relations committees in the Senate can have major implications to prevent a potential genocide in Eastern D.R.C against the Congolese Tutsi and can help the government of D.R.C to solve its problems with neighboring countries through diplomatic means, without involving militia and armed groups, which are spread throughout Eastern D.R.C.

We very much appreciate your attention to this outcry of endangered members of our community in D.R.Congo and look forward for an appointment at your convenience.

For details, please contact us at our email isoko.2021@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Safari Munyarugendo

President

cc: All Senators of Foreign Relations Committee

Risch, James E. (ID), *Chairman*

Ricketts, Pete (NE)

McCormick, David (PA)

Daines, Steve (MT)

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